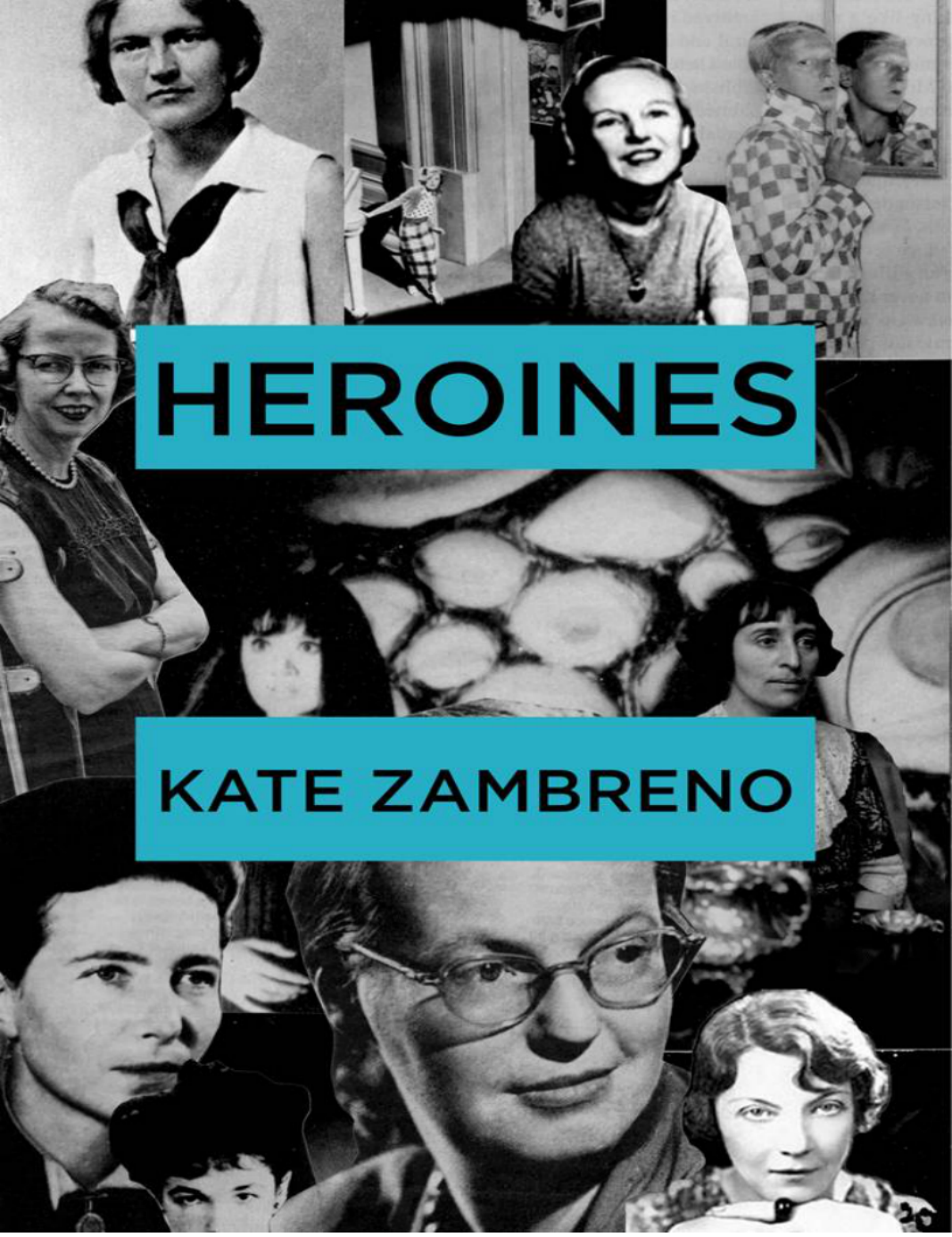
HEROINES
KATE ZAMBRENO

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

Annotation

I am beginning to realize that taking the self out of our essays is a form of repression. Taking the self out feels like obeying a gag order-pretending an objectivity where there is nothing objective about the experience of confronting and engaging with and swooning over literature." — from Heroines

On the last day of December, 2009 Kate Zambreno began a blog called *Frances Farmer Is My Sister*, arising from her obsession with the female modernists and her recent transplantation to Akron, Ohio, where her husband held a university job. Widely reposted, Zambreno's blog became an outlet for her highly informed and passionate rants about the fates of the modernist "wives and mistresses." In her blog entries, Zambreno reclaimed the traditionally pathologized biographies of Vivienne Eliot, Jane Bowles, Jean Rhys, and Zelda Fitzgerald: writers and artists themselves who served as male writers' muses only to end their lives silenced, erased, and institutionalized. Over the course of two years, *Frances Farmer Is My Sister* helped create a community where today's "toxic girls" could devise a new feminist discourse, writing in the margins and developing an alternative canon.

In *Heroines*, Zambreno extends the polemic begun on her blog into a dazzling, original work of literary scholarship. Combing theories that have dictated what literature should be and who is allowed to write it-from T. S. Eliot's New Criticism to the writings of such mid-century intellectuals as Elizabeth Hardwick and Mary McCarthy to the occasional "girl-on-girl crime" of the Second Wave of feminism-she traces the genesis of a cultural template that consistently exiles female experience to the realm of the "minor," and diagnoses women for transgressing social bounds. "ANXIETY: When she experiences it, it's pathological," writes Zambreno. "When he does, it's existential." By advancing the Girl-As-Philosopher, Zambreno reinvents feminism for her generation while providing a model for a newly subjectivized criticism.

- Kate Zambreno
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Kate Zambreno

Heroines

This book is dedicated to my friend Suzanne Scanlon — to writing ourselves as our own characters.

This book is also for the girls who still seem, as they did in Virginia Woolf 's time, so fearfully depressed.

~ ~ ~

She was supposed to fuck a god high up on his mountaintop, but she refused. She wouldn't listen to Apollo's reasoning. So he cursed her, a life sentence. He said, Sure, you can live forever, as many grains of sand in your hand, but that young lovely body will be gone, you will wrinkle up into nothingness. Who will love you now? Who will listen?

Eventually her body was kept in a jar, and then there was only her voice left.

Only her voice left.

And then not really her voice at all.

The rhythm of my madwomen's lives: a long scream followed by absolute silence.

At the beginning, I think of endings.

The mad wives of modernism who died in the asylum. Locked away, rendered safe. Forgotten, erased, or rewritten. Vivien(ne) Eliot, whose alter ego in her writing was Sibylla, the voice in the jar that begins her husband's poem "The Waste Land." Zelda Fitzgerald, the tarnished golden girl of her husband's legend, who burned to death in an asylum fire in Asheville, North Carolina. All that remained to identify her: a single charred slipper. Jane Bowles stroked out, later buried in an unmarked grave in Málaga, Spain, while her husband Paul never stopped writing.

Sitting at the mouth of my cave, I string together fragments on paper. My scraps scattering to the wind if unread.

Out of this narrative will emerge a chalk outline. It is the body of a woman.

These fragments I have shored against my ruins.

Part 1

2005

We have just moved back to Chicago from a year spent in London. Most days I cannot be alone in my little red office, my hermitage on Hermitage Avenue in the Ukrainian Village neighborhood, trapped like a Trappist, as Djuna Barnes quipped of her

monkish isolation at Patchin Place in the Village, in the years after Paris, after Thelma Wood and *Nightwood*. I am trying to learn how to be a serious writer and write important books, yet I cannot deal with all of the silence. All summer accompanying John to the Newberry Library, limping in my new sandals, bathing my bleeding sweaty feet in the downstairs sink like I am some homeless woman, changing the bandages that melt off in the heat. I sit in Washington Square Park and write in my notebook, unable to last for long taking notes in one of the library's reading rooms. John's job is to sit in a glassed-off cell and watch people to make sure they don't steal any rare books. I escape downstairs to the visitors' room, observing people as they buy Snickers and sodas from the vending machines. I am always unable to endure institutional settings. I usually find more alienation in the deadly quiet of such environments, like the girl-opposite of the narrator in Sartre's *Nausea*. A *flâneuse,* I stroll around the Gold Coast and go in and out of shops, buying nothing, maybe a lipstick at Marshall Field's, feeling the cool of the AC alternate with the heat of outside.

Yes, this is when I first became enthralled by the mad wives, my eternal reference point; when I began reading the lives of these women often marginalized in the modernist memory project. They have been with me for as long as I have tried to write — like ghostly tutors. Never having taken creative writing, save for one disastrous workshop as a journalism undergrad, I felt alone and friendless in the process of attempting to create myself as a writer. Minus a community, I invented one. "I entered into alliances with my paper soulmates," writes Hélène Cixous in her essay "Coming to Writing." These women served as an invisible community — like in Susan Sontag's play *Alice in Bed*, about the brilliant letter writer and diarist Alice James (sister-of-Great-Men, Henry and William), except I'm the neurasthenic, and they are all hovering over me. Or like in Judy Chicago's 80s installation *The Dinner Party*, where she lays out place settings for famous heroines both real and fictional.

My invisible community — yes, they too were made invisible.

I recently saw Chicago's installation at the Brooklyn Museum, and what struck me was how cheap the silverware seemed. And yet the tapestries were so lovingly and laboriously woven.

2009

Akron, Ohio. John has been hired to curate and organize a small collection of rare books at the university here, the centerpiece of which was the gift of a rubber industrialist, who owned a great deal of the book collectors' canon — a few early Shakespeare folios, Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary*, two first editions of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of*

Grass. The position is tenure-tracked (which, in the rules of marital chess, trumps a fairly satisfying slate of adjunct work back home in Chicago — King takes Queen).

The wife will just have to find something, of course. Adjunct, adjunctive.

We live in a squat Victorian building near the university. We move in sight unseen (this has become a habit for us). The adjacent building and ours are the only apartment complexes on our rather suburban street. Backyards littered with all the paraphernalia of childhood, as Esther Greenwood observes with a shudder in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. Children with their shattering screams. Vivien(ne)'s line added to "The Waste Land," should be delivered in your best imitation Cockney screech: *What you get married for if you don't want children*.

My office is the apartment's solarium framed by light and windows. At first I thought, yeah, alright. A sort of writing retreat. A room of one's own. All that. Virginia Woolf prescribed the bucolic of the country. A calm respite from the city's hysteria. (I was so panicky all the time where we last lived, on 18th Street in Chicago, a man murdered on our street the week we moved out, children playing calmly near his chalk outline. Always our moves seem like sudden, frantic escapes, not properly considering the next because we are so anxious to remove ourselves from the former.)

I am told, rather abruptly by the head of the English department here, that I am not qualified to teach literature. Male professors with no interest in the subject teach women's literature instead. I am reminded of my lack of a terminal degree. (Why does the idea always feel like a death?)

I find work teaching Introduction to Women's Studies, writing SUFFRAGE on the board to bored and sometimes bemused and occasionally bitter faces. Packed classrooms. A campus diversity requirement. The university here is alarmingly Christian — a megachurch dubbed The Chapel, one of the university's benefactors, sits on the edge of the campus. One of their ministries is a Pray Until You're Straight program called "Bonds of Iron." The working conditions here are much worse than in Chicago — it is illegal for part-timers to unionize in Ohio, so I have no office or even much of a communal workspace, and the pay is dismal.

As soon as we land here I begin wishing ardently to get out of this black-and-white Midwestern landscape, a town formerly industrious, its factories now sit like the vacant, rotting husks of industry. The sad *Wizard of Oz* window display for Christmas in one of the emptied downtown storefronts. Clark Gable once worked here in one of the tire factories — it was a step up from his father's farm but he too left for

dreams of grandeur. Who wouldn't leave? Everyone asks: Why? About our move. The economy, you know. I mumble. A great job. (I want to really say: I DON'T FUCKING KNOW. But I don't. I tell the mutual lie of marriage.)

The nearby Cuyahoga Valley is beautiful in its autumnal blaze. But the city itself so often Midwestern gothic. Strange sightings. The woman wandering into the Radio Shack with a half-eaten hot-dog in one hand, fingering the merchandise with the ketchup- and mustard-stained other. Another woman padding down the emptied-out Main Street with duct-tape over her face, clutching a Big Gulp (John observes: the kidnapped on her lunch break). We bond more intensely in our mutual dystopic vision. (Our favorite shared writer of the moment is Thomas Bernhard, when we first met it was Beckett.) A different sort of alienation than when we lived in London, or moved back to Chicago.

I am an alien here. My short cropped hair and my black Joan of Arc jacket, shiny from years of wear, the interior all torn out and replaced, a remnant from our splurges on his student loans in London department stores. I feel myself stared at in the grocery store, on campus. I'm also going through a butch phase, all tight men's jeans, perhaps a sartorial revolt from my new, more feminine role. John is stared at too with his longish hair and darling dandy vests. He does not care. Although most days I don't even leave the house, and lounge around in what I've been sleeping in for days, in the blink and the glare of the outside world I do not often wear my faded and cherished articles of clothing. Except when we make regular trips to Chicago to visit my father or occasional ones to New York. I feel they would be wasted here. This wasteland.

I have become used to wearing, it seems, the constant pose of the foreigner.

Chicago now our pilgrimage, which we once wanted so desperately to escape. In Chicago, New York was our Moscow, like in Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. It is our pattern: we forget so soon what made us want to flee, we cover it over with nostalgia, Zelda writing her novelist-husband wistfully of their honeymoon days while in the asylum. This shrine we build to our own shared origins. Viv's shrine to Tom, once he had abandoned her, next to her framed picture of Sir Oswald Mosley, head of the British Union of Fascists. (Does every woman, really, love a fascist?)

I've tried to block out the local uproar dealing with Akron native LeBron James leaving the Cleveland Cavaliers. I've always found it pernicious, how those in the Midwest criminalize those who leave, as though it were some rejection of their own lives. Unlike the ambivalence towards their now-prodigal son, rock musician Chrissie

Hynde of the 80s group The Pretenders is a much loved celebrity here. “Chrissie” this. “Chrissie” that. The vegan Italian comfort food restaurant she owns in town has become our culinary sanctuary.

As a girl I remember reading an interview with Chrissie Hynde in *Rolling Stone* about how she left this city in Ohio when she was young and moved to London. I remember thinking of her as this example of what I could do myself one day. That I could leave Chicago, leave the family, leave the Midwest. And I did. For a little bit. But now I am back here. The eternal return. (To write, perhaps, is to always return.)

So many of the gods of modernism hailed from the Midwest. Scott Fitzgerald from St. Paul. Ezra Pound fired from the college in Indiana. Tom Eliot of the lofty Eliots of St. Louis. And they all escaped, to Europe — they became expatriate, cosmopolitan. They managed to shed their origins, their Midwestern skin. Hemingway years earlier attended the same high school in Oak Park, Illinois as my father and his siblings. God, I idolized Hemingway when I was in journalism school. Now I hate his guts because of how he demonized Zelda in his memoir *A Moveable Feast*. And for how he treated his wife Hadley. She, summarily dismissed.

(I am now in another union. It is a union of forgotten or erased wives. I pay my dues daily.)

In Cleveland the local bibliophilic society explicitly prohibits women from joining. John attended a meeting at the invitation of his colleague at Oberlin. (I was not happy.) One of those quasi-secret societies of rich white men with bizarre rituals, held in some grand Victorian home. The series of tableaux that begin Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, her treatise on the material conditions that could allow a woman to write, to write well. Her scenes illuminating women banned from the grounds and libraries and luncheons of the fictional college Oxbridge, to show that a woman of her time would be banned from all the public spaces of reflection and socialization and higher learning that Woolf argues are important in order to begin to have the interior space to roam about in, to think the lucid thoughts that foster Great Texts.

This sort of segregation is familiar to literary modernism, with their cliques and societies. The most famous one being Gertrude Stein’s salon at 27 Rue de Fleurus. Stein would hang out with Hemingway and Fitzgerald while Alice B. Toklas in the next room would make small talk with the wives. Gertrude Stein ventriloquizing Alice in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (with any sense of irony to the inequality? I don’t know): She speaks to the greats, while I talked to the wives and mistresses.

Oh, but the stories they have to tell.

Of course since we've moved here I've been rereading *Madame Bovary*. I am Madame Bovary as I read *Madame Bovary*. Ennui, excess of emotions. *C'est moi*. I am Zelda, I am Vivien(ne).

Zelda and Vivien(ne) both bored in their new lives as women married to the literary prophets of their generations. Both suffering from Madame Bovary's disease until other, more ominous ones were diagnosed and even more ominously treated. "Vivien was still in poor health, and suffered from nervous headaches and sleeplessness — no doubt aggravated by the fact that, while her husband was actively and continually engaged in work of some kind, she had very little to do and was becoming bored."

God, it's boring here. Stuck in the provinces. The novelist Jean Rhys' bungalow in Cornwall where she spent her exile, for years and years in poverty and obscurity writing her heroine in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, rewriting the madwoman Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. "All the dullest books ever written have ended their lives here," she wrote in a letter to her daughter.

I must get as far away as possible. Must escape stagnancy, miserabilism. Yet I am here, frozen. I am afflicted with Eliot's *aboulie*. I know I want to leave this stale town as soon as possible. I am sure if I do not I will die.

I think of Madame Bovary. "She longed to travel, or to go back and live in the convent. She wanted both to die and to live in Paris."

I begin rereading the journals of Anaïs Nin, both the abbreviated ones that she published during her lifetime, and then the ones with all of the fucking (which I prefer of course). In the narrative Anaïs weaves over countless journals, she is a liberated woman who finally escapes the oppression of her provincial environment. In her version she leaves out Hugo, her banker-husband who supports her. Apparently, according to Nin's biographer, all the American housewives who first read Nin's journals felt they were given permission to leave their marriages, but then felt betrayed when they learned the truth.

I suppose I could take John out of this accounting entirely — but then who would believe that I was in Akron by choice?

Living here I develop a desire to be analyzed, probably because of all the Anaïs Nin I've been reading, Nin who had an affair with her analyst, Otto Rank, who wrote a book on the artist. Perhaps this is a desire to be interpreted like a literary character. I leave a message for the Cleveland Center of Psychoanalysis. I begin to toy with the idea of training to be a psychoanalyst, and I will become a feminist analyst to tortured, eccentric artists. Like Julia Kristeva. Sylvia Plath who considered a Ph.D. in psychology.

A woman at the Center calls me back and I change my mind and

never return her call. (I realize the costly sessions would be daily, I have not yet figured out the forty-minute drive, refuse to drive anywhere here, in fact.)

I wake up and read although Nietzsche says that's foolish. A sort of narcotic, reading. I read with my hands down the front of my pants — my mode of reading is masturbatory. Sometimes I feel guilty about my lubed fingers all over library books.

Reading Anaïs Nin's diaries and Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* in tandem makes me want to have affairs, despite, or maybe because of, the intensity of my love for John — how I once idealized the apparently open marriages of modernism, the triangulation of Anaïs, Henry and June, the free love of Bloomsbury, the Bowles who shared everything except their beds.

(In London, the temptation of an angel-faced philosophy student.)

I too want to have a sensual awakening outside of marrriage, like Emma Bovary or Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. Wifedom a possession. I don't want to be possessed. I want to be free. Like Charlotte Brontë projecting onto her heroine Jane Eyre her desire for experience, as Virginia Woolf critiques in *A Room of One's Own*— except instead of wanting to travel the world, reading these books I temporarily want to fuck the world — a literary nymphomania.

Because of the mythical lothario conjured up in Nin's journals, I've always fantasized about having an affair with Henry Miller, horn-dog Henry Miller, who can't keep his hands off me, who will back me over a couch and go at me, who will fuck me so I stay fucked.

In Paris during the second leg of the Bowles' honeymoon, Jane goes out alone at night, prowling the streets, the lesbian bars. Jane Bowles who loved to slum like Baudelaire, like Vivien Leigh channeling Blanche DuBois. Outside of one club a homeless-looking man propositions her nightly. Some time later she sees the man's picture in the books section of the newspaper. Her forgotten man in the back alley — Henry Miller.

I begin to compulsively read historical romances as research for a novel, featuring a housewife named Emma who inhales historical romances to numb herself. For days in a daze I can't read anything except these romance novels. (I prefer Regency romances, costume dramas, like Jane Austen with fucking.) I suddenly become allergic to anything more highbrow. I watch TV on my computer during the day when I am supposed to be writing, my favorites are teen soap operas. I ghost fan forums endlessly analyzing character motivation as well as "shipping" certain characters, short for "relationshipping," everyone so passionate about the characters they just know are destined to be together.

We are invited over to the house of two history professors for Thanksgiving. We can't eat most of the food because of our vegan diet, and I've also been having terrible digestive problems. They have made four types of cranberry dressing. It's the only thing we can eat and the hosts blink expectantly at us. One has tequila in it. I lick my spoon tremulously and think of Emma licking the bottom of her glass as Charles falls deep within it. There is a young man there, a jazz pianist with soulful eyes. I realize he might be their pot dealer. I find myself mildly flirting with him. My stomach cramps up. I am bowed over. He could be my Leon, I muse absentmindedly.

Did Tom foist Bertrand Russell on Vivien(ne), to give her something to do?

Here, I am the wife of. That is how I am introduced by others. Not a writer. A wife. (No one seems to care that I am a writer, awaiting the publication of a slim, nervous novella.) Everyone much more fascinated with John's career. In his dungeon office John is surrounded by piles of leatherbound volumes, books that look burned, in several languages, a Babylon. Eliot studying languages while at Lloyd's bank. I love seeing John fingering a book, reading its leaves, soothsaying it, speaking its secret history. He can lapse into the charming pedant so easily. My Professor X, as Woolf calls the patriarchs of higher learning in *Room*. Vivien(ne) sitting in on the Victorian literature classes Tom taught to working-class adults. Her expression rapt, worshipful. She sacrificed everything for him, for his eventual genius.

I am realizing you *become* a wife, despite the mutual attempt at an egalitarian partnership, once you agree to move for him. You are placed into the feminine role — you play the pawn. Once you let that tornado take you away into the self-abnegating state of wifedom. Which I did from the beginning, now almost a decade ago, quitting my job as an editor of an alt-weekly so we could live in London and he could attend a graduate program in the history of the book.

I write this book of shadow histories. These histories of books' shadows.

Sylvia Plath was fascinated with the figure of the *dybbuk*, the wandering, disembodied soul in Jewish mythology. Usually the souls of suicides. "I am the ghost of a former suicide" —the beginning line of her poem "Electra on Azalea Path." A doubling, the *dybbuk*.

Anne Sexton, who thought she was the reincarnation of Edna St. Vincent Millay.

"There are also reports of people who see, in their dreams, actual events in the lives of other people, both past and future."

The mad wife's journey from committed to committal.

"We are married. The sibylline parrots are protesting the sway of the first bobbed heads in the Biltmore paneled luxe."—F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, "Show Mr. and Mrs. F to Number—"

Zelda's words but a communal byline. He snatches up her *bon mots*, her odd phrasings, on little scraps of papers, backs of envelopes. Her diaries before she was married. A Mrs.

Vivien(ne)'s literary alter-ego Sibylla. The sibylline parrots. A pair of pretty birds. Zelda and Viv, the frenzied flappers who gave words to their writer husbands.

We are married. A definitive statement. A pronouncement.

That famous photograph of the Fitzes: sleek lions' faces, features blending into each other. Both so stoic and self-absorbed. They are acting a role. They are the famous feuding Fitzgeralds. Almost incestuous.

Of Vivien(ne) and Tom, a biographer wrote: "Each felt a Narcissus-like spark of recognition in the other's presence."

Our delirious dyad. We are everything for each other, siblings, parents, intimates, lovers, enemies…

What do you really want to write? John asks me. We are at a bar in Bucktown in Chicago. We have just met. We have not yet spent the night together, but once we do for years we will never spend it apart. Me writing 2500 words a week for the alt-weekly tossing out witticisms in formulaic articles and essays like some chick-lit version of Dorothy Parker or Renata Adler. At the time John is the managing editor of a local literary magazine. By day he works in fundraising for a cultural organization. Once we begin dating I start penning a quippy personal column under the pseudonym Janey Smith (a nod to Kathy Acker's anti-heroine), which he edits for me.

As soon as we met I made him a character.

What do I really want to write? I want to write novels. Because that is what one is supposed to write, right, if one writes. Ring Lardner's quip: "Mr. Fitzgerald is a novelist and Mrs. Fitzgerald is a novelty." I want to be taken seriously above all I want him to take me seriously.

(I met him before I was a mess of pages, and a wind or a word could tear me apart.)

Is it true when I met him I knew he was my editor? I am Hilda Doolittle looking to be renamed *H.D., Imagiste*, by Ezra Pound, Jean Rhys falling for Ford Madox Ford, Jane Bowles, all the rest. Tom's marks on Viv's notebooks and later officially at Faber & Faber, lording over Djuna. I am sleepwalking through the 1920s with my ink-stained hands and collection of cloche hats and brilliant fascist of a husband.

The cloche hat with the buckle I bought at the boutique before we left…we called it my wedding hat.

When Jane first saw Paul she said to a friend, he's my enemy. When she met the young composer she wore her hair short and smoked short Cuban cigars. Sylvia taking a bite out of the apple of Ted's cheek. Edenic.

Prophets and prophesies. Jane and witchy Cherifa. Madame Sosostris in Eliot's epic. Sylvia and Ted's Ouija board.

Zelda to Scott in one of her letters: "I DO want to marry you — even if you do think I 'dread' it — I wish you hadn't said that…"

Vivien Haigh-Wood and Thomas Stearns Eliot were married at Hampstead Register Office in 1915 after knowing each other for three months (by that time, she had shortened her name, she would lengthen it again). It was a heroic mission — Ezra Pound had urged Vivien(ne) to marry the poet to keep him in England, just as he later took up the Bel Esprit.

We echoed the Eliots. Marrying fast out of a sense of noble adventure (they had known each other three months, we had known each other nine). We who were going to live extraordinary lives. We who were going to *be* extraordinary. (She pinned her hopes on the Great Poet, we pinned ours on each other.)

Later she will be punished, continually reminded, of her impulsivity, it will be used to convict her, when this is why he originally fell for her. (Why is falling the model of love? Like down a rabbit hole.)

The chairs at Chicago's City Hall were orange, hard, plastic.

Zelda in her grey suit the color of her eyes. Those eyes. For the ceremony a suit of midnight blue, the hat trimmed with leather ribbons and buckles. A corsage of white orchids. "She was the only ornament at her own wedding."

For Tom's marriage certificate he wrote "of no occupation." How would they occupy themselves? There was the question of where to live and where the money would come from. Always a pressing financial crisis. No verse is completely free.

Our name is called. Or did we have a number, like at a deli. (I cannot remember. I cannot recall. *Do you know nothing…Do you remember nothing?*)

The quickie at St. Patrick's was perhaps Scott worried Zelda would (again) change her mind. His princess he always threatened to keep locked up in his tower. "There was no music, no flowers, no photographer, and no lunch for the out-of-town visitors." Some say Zelda never forgave him.

The buried grudges of marriage.

Every year the memory vomits up again, especially after every move. Love of our kind requires so much amnesia. Despite his eternal apologies. Despite how far we've come, how we've both changed,

grown, our bond strengthened, one of now mutual respect, constant communication. For I love him yes I love him but ours is not a romantic tale of origins. Of how we came to be.

(At one of those kitschy downtown Asian theme restaurants with that woman from the British Consulate. Her posh and nasally tones. She left us with the bill, and the assurance that, *oh, yes*, we'd have to get married, if we wanted to go to London together. Oh and I should try writing a *multicultural* novel, it is *all the thing*.)

She does not pronounce us anything. We still have to stay and sign things. We do not even kiss afterwards. We do not mimic this well-rehearsed denouement. Or perhaps, laughing, embarrassed, a quick peck. As if to prove for invisible eyes that this is real. We were real.

(You decided then that I could come with you if I wanted, and perhaps work under the table. You were uncomfortable, you said, with the institution of marriage. Or you would do it, if we promised *it didn't mean anything*. You were plotting your escape route, just like Tom, later on.)

Only one family member — Vivien(ne)'s aunt — was present. They were trying to keep their hasty union secret from their tyrannical mothers. The esteemed Eliots' later announcement in the *St. Louis Globe Democrat* was "heavy with disapproval."

If we were waiting for permission she did not grant it.

Afterwards we sat in the back of a cab numbed, nervous. You had a Polaroid camera. Our wedding photo. There are some days we don't want proof of. We look like we had been booked for a lifetime sentence.

(And when I spit, bit, back, that served as your excuse. My violence you instigated allowed you to distance yourself. The time I threw my chair at you in my tiny loft apartment on Chicago Avenue. No, I don't know how you can go to London with someone who acts like that. Lucia Joyce, James' daughter, put away for throwing a chair. I am the artist! she cried. To invalidate, R.D. Laing writes, can stir one to violence.)

That month honeymoon in New York hotels. Scott bought her a new Patou suit. "They were interviewed; they rode on the roof of taxis; they jumped into fountains; there was always a party to go to." Later, Zelda wrote, "There was a tart smell of gin over everything." Zelda nostalgic in letters to Scott, now forever separated, she trapped in an institution, in a body, aflame with eczema, a scaled she-monster later immortalized in *Tender is the Night*, he trapped in Hollywood, in afternoon alcoholism. That was when you…Remember, darling? "Do you still smell of pencils and sometimes of tweed?" A lovely Zelda association.

Bored after a year in New York the Fitzgeralds took a short trip to Europe. They sailed on the *Aquitania*. First Class. Zelda was pregnant and pouty.

Their itinerary: England, France, dull, dull, Venice, Rome, all ruins, back to London, where he invested in tailored suits. Scott wrote: "God damn the continent of Europe. It is of merely antiquarian interest."

Thinking back, the most extraordinary aspect of this episode was the cab ride. At that time we never took cabs.

What did we do that afternoon? I think we bought socks at the Nordstrom Rack downtown. We went out for sushi, but I felt sick and couldn't eat. At night in his bed I announced, I think, dizzily, "We're married!" John shushed me. He didn't want his roommates to hear. He didn't want his parents finding out before we were safely in London.

Ah yes. The reason for the cab. Next stop, British Consulate.

Another wedding photo: Our dazed reproductions gazing from our passport books, our one-year visas. That is when you used to hike up your collar for photographs, like a mean street youth from the 1950s. I am dour, expressionless. I look vaguely Eastern European. One young bride ordered by male.

We fly Air India. We attempt to drown out the army of babies who have set up camp in our inner ear — an infantry.

Our first test. We are married. We smile too brightly at the customs officer at Heathrow. I am his wife. The first time ever spoken. My husband will be attending graduate school for the year. To wife. A word. Like something heavy one carries down the street. A verb? What does a wife do? Oh, me? I'll find something, I'm sure.

I am supposed to stay in our awful little green room in married student housing and WRITE. For months I cannot find work, until I land temporary holiday employment at a bookstore. Can't WRITE. My first real solitude, alone in a new country, newly married. A different sort of breakdown than in my early twenties, the one that made me watchful, watched. He would get home and I would be sobbing in the bathtub. And so it all began, our dance, of the needy and the needed.

At home together in Akron we spend most of our time in the unfinished dining room. Sitting at the wooden table that we purchased for $50 at the junk shop, the matching chairs with stained pale-turquoise fabric, soon one of the chairs breaks and then we just have three. Anyway, it is just the two of us, we know no one, no one visits us. In a letter to her mother-in-law, Vivien(ne) complains of their incarceration: "We are just two waifs who live perched up in our little flat — no-one around us knows us, or sees us, or bothers to care how we live or what we do, or whether we live or not." The hideous fake

brass chandelier probably purchased from Home Depot. And then the wallpaper — an ugly, screaming red, blanketed by stripes of sickly-pink roses with green leaves set against a black background. We despise this wallpaper. We comment on it constantly. It consumes us, surrounds us. As soon as we are in the room we are depressed, instantly, because of the wallpaper. We consider painting over it, as we painted the living room, a calming organic gray. A living room still dark and windowless, which is why we don't ever live in it (it doesn't feel much like living anyway). But we don't — because as always in the places we live we are sure we are going to leave soon — so why finish it?

(A life that is like a shadow life. A wife that is like a shadow wife.)

When John is with me on the weekends, we can escape outside of our head spaces, and look out at all the absurdity of this strange new landscape together — such, still, spasms of joy, just being together, the intense pleasure of being in each other's presence, making out like teenagers, dancing ecstatically in the kitchen, going to various grocery stores, certain produce we buy at each, cooking our meals at home, taking walks around the neighborhood, hand-in-hand or arm encircling waist and looking at everyone's proud gardens, always, always planning, plotting, for another, better, future — it is manageable. We are, as always, partners-in-crime. We are, most of the time, madly, disgustingly, in love, yes, CRAZY for each other.

(Yet sometimes I am convinced I am just crazy.)

Always the return. To the bliss and ecstasy but then the depths of despair when HE IS GONE.

Alone in these first few months, it is absolutely unbearable. Alone I forget. (Or perhaps, I remember.) A torrent of sobs every day, at my desk. In this new environment I have seemingly forgotten my own sovereignty.

When I am productive with writing — I am light, happy, even high-functioning in the domestic realm. Yet on most days the heaviness sets in and I refuse to leave on my own. When I don't write I don't feel I deserve the day. I stay inside and choose not to exist. I mimic one of my favorite living writers, the acidic Austrian novelist Elfriede Jelinek, at home in her designer clothes, always, always at home. Yet isn't the Great Male Writer also under a self-imposed house arrest while creating? Who gets to say what's pathological?

It is not lost on me the similarities in my current situation to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story "The Yellow Wallpaper," which I teach. The husband named John. The gothic surroundings. The sense of being isolated, haunted. And I am: Unnamed Narrator. It's really all

so Victorian I can't stand it.

I begin to call John up constantly while he is at work. I insist on reading him everything I've written for that day. A ritual resurrected. I need him to constantly validate me. It's good, he tells me. My lover, my literary advisor. I need, I knead.

Do you love it?

Do you love it or just like it?

It's good. It's really good.

(One cannot speak to Zelda in superlatives.)

If he dismisses me once, it's all over. Everything rises or falls on the inflection in his voice. The ability for me to remain vertical not horizontal (to reword Sylvia).

He now speaks to me with his banker's hat on. He is anxious to get off the phone. Clipped. "Okay." "Okay."

DESTROY HE SAID. My phone calls to him are often when I give up my writing every day, exhausted.

(He tries, I am trying.)

We are in the Austrian poet Ingeborg Bachmann's novel *Malina* in these scenes we play. He the brutal, clipped Svengali, me the emotional woman writer. He is Malina, my live-in double. I get jealous over how much John loves Ingeborg Bachmann.

He emails me. He is now John, not automaton. He quotes me Paul Celan,

Every word you speak
You owe to
Destruction

Paul Celan, the model for the stranger who rescues the fairytale princess in Malina. (He is my prince I insist on rescuing me from my day.)

H/h: code on the romance review sites for "Hero/heroine." Capital, lowercase.

In our copy of Bachmann's novel John has penciled in the margins. I find it upon a reread.

Dearest Kate,
Never let me become your Malina.
Forgive me, for when I have been.
It's the fascism bred in the minds of men.

And when I read this of course I swoon, I feel so in love. The woman in *Malina* loves Ivan she is happy happy happy she cries from the rooftops happy happy happy!

I distrust the Feminine in literature," T.S. Eliot once opined. A fear of the feminine in writing — of the hysterical, the emotional, the violent. Much as we fear women's rage and tears.

In Eliot's essay on *Hamlet* in which he coins the phrase "objective correlative," he writes, "Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear." His theories of depersonalization form the foundation of the theoretical school called New Criticism, still the fundamental ideology governing how we read and talk about writing. One cannot portray emotions in excess (in literature or in life). This is a judgment not only of a work of literature but also of propriety, how one should behave. One must discipline one's text, one's self.

HE DO THE POLICE IN DIFFERENT VOICES — the original title of "The Waste Land."

Why is Hamlet's grief excessive? (Ummm, let's see, his father was murdered, his mother is fucking his uncle, it's cold in Denmark, maybe that's enough for a bad mood, IT'S COLD IN DENMARK.) But Hamlet is still allowed to be overcome by despair, however excessive, because it is still read as existential. He is the hero of the story. It's Ophelia who wails and moans and drowns in an inch of water. But Eliot doesn't ask about her objective correlative. If Hamlet is seen as overwrought to T.S. Eliot, what does he think of Ophelia's melancholic swoons? He who conjures up her dramatic goodnight speech in "The Waste Land" ("Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.") Nothing is objective to Ophelia. It is all, so so subjective. She takes things so personally.

Viv in a letter to Tom's brother: "And *be personal*. You must be personal, or else it's no good."

He is the guardian of the correct, at home and in literature, of what is kept out (emotions, excess).

The real *jouissance* of these romance novels, for me, is the change that occurs within these arrogant male aristocrats when they fall in love, the melting of their fortress of icy remove. They become caretakers instead, no longer cold and cruel, standoffish Lloyd's of London bankers.

In Flaubert's novel Charles moves himself and his wife to a new town because Emma has begun to display symptoms of melancholy. But we are not supposed to read Emma as an existential heroine. Flaubert depicts her misery as frivolous and poisoned by schoolgirl fantasies, of never being able to be happy with anything real, like her doting if dull husband. But maybe Emma is moody because she feels trapped. She has just left her father's home, the boring farm, and now she is stuck in some backwater town. An alienation of the self — to go from daughter to wife and expect freedom in that movement.

(Yet marriage was considered a cure for hysteria.)

Not enough has been made of the existential alienation that can come for women in that first year of marriage. Both Virginia and Viv

experienced this debilitating depression. The first years of Woolf 's marriage "beset by arguments, extended periods of alienation." Virginia's suicide attempt the second year.

They were expected to leave the house they grew up in, change their names, and be suddenly not their own sovereign person but a "wife-of."

Vivien(ne) hated when she was left alone. Jane too could not stand to be alone. Zelda would grow enraged as Scott would work and ignore her.

"She had reverted to infantile terrors of loneliness," writes one of Eliot's biographers of Vivien(ne).

(I read these biographies of the Great Men, their pathologizing, constructing, language, and hone my fury, like listening to right-wing talk radio.)

In Greek tragedy, Penelope is the wife who resigns herself to waiting. Clytaemnestra is the wife who waits and grows murderous.

A woman's voice, in quotations. "My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me. / Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak."

"Yes & wonderful, wonderful," wrote Viv times two on the typescript of "The Waste Land," which she helped edit, supplied lines for, even wrote another clever passage herself excised by Ezra Pound but that appeared later under a pseudonym in their little magazine, *The Criterion*.

"Photography," Ezra scrawled next to these lines. A too-true snapshot of an unhappy marriage.

The "A Game of Chess" section conjures up a trapped mutual miserabilism. A tiny, cramped domestic space. The murder of a small room. Elizabeth Bowen observed that the Eliots were "two highly nervous people shut up together in grinding proximity." He punishes her with silence. It riles her up more. "He did not see that Eliot, in starving Vivien of affection, was unwittingly contributing to her hysteria." She tries to get him to talk to her, her shrill, nervous voice.

"What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?" Our bickering a constant patter, rhythm, in our domestic quotidian. "I never know what you are thinking. Think." I who insist on narrativizing everything, on giving voice to a constant monologue. He who often prefers silence, introspection.

She is battering around the room, a zinging ball, wanting to escape. He answers in monotone. Her persistent interrogations which threaten to evict all sense from his brain. She pushes him to the edge. Threatens to rush out on the street raving. Makes him remember and resurrect personal traumas.

The section has the aesthetic of shell shock (the masculine term

for hysteria, soldiers coming home from WWI and jumping out of windows, like Septimus Smith in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*).

The Great Men's marriages were their wars. They who didn't actually make the Great War. Eliot, unfit because of his hernia. Fitzgerald who enlisted but never actually saw the front lines, much to his disappointment.

A return to these old roles that we play, that we didn't even originate. All the ghosts of the past. Ghosts that aren't even our ghosts.

When? A day here, or maybe a day in Chicago.

At the odds and ends of everything today. Slamming up against his marble remove. I pick fights, I pick at him, we are monkeys in a cage.

"In the Cage"—the original title of the "A Game of Chess" section of "The Waste Land."

The suitcase pulled to the center of the room, like the feuding Fitzgeralds. "Infamous rows."

Zelda would wildly flirt with other men. The rumored affair with the aviator. Scott had his actresses. A marriage so soon in ruins. Scott began to drink. Zelda began to implode. Photos where the strains are showing. In photographs their smiles are tight, Zelda is tense, ready to strike.

Simone de B writing of Frieda and D.H. Lawrence's numerous and physical fights (usually over Frieda's children, who she left to be with Lawrence): "Married life had become for them a series of scenes repeated over and over in which neither of them would give in, turning the least quarrel into a titanic duel between Man and Woman."

It does feel like a war with him, at these times, a grudge match stripped of memory, naked.

Sometimes I feel I am living with the Enemy.

Sometimes I know I am living with the Enemy.

It is like you have two selves. And you have no memory of the other self. You can be withholding, cold. You can be nurturing, supportive. I have two selves too. The me that lectures women on literature where husbands oppress their wives, and the me that secretly lives that life.

When I read Vivien(ne)'s biography, I cast John as the villain in my current misery. I am more aware than ever how I become infected by his containment, his repression, his almost paranoid desire for privacy.

Fights fueled by feelings of entrapment, a fervent, feral desire to escape. "Enforced domesticity brought on black moods."

They were always moving, moving, moving, Tom and Viv, the unhappy couple. Eliot's Soho bachelor lodgings at 35 Greek Street wouldn't do. And so began their game of musical chairs. Vivien(ne) loved to dance to the phonograph. Bertrand Russell paid for her lessons. Zelda had the same ballet teacher as Lucia Joyce. She would bring Madame Egorova white flowers in glasses.

Always searching, frantic to get out of London, to a country cottage, *somewhere can you please help* they send furious SOS's to their rich friends. Then later the tourism of sanitoriums and seaside convalescence. In their years together, Tom plunged into a suicidal depression. Each of them struggled with terrible influenza. Her "nerve-storms" and migraines. "Quarrels and migraines punctuated their lives."

What was he trying to escape from? His new bride, most likely. "It is terrible to be alone with another person," Eliot writes, a line later excised from "The Waste Land."

In London, we moved around wildly. Three times in nine months — all the modernist couples moved so much, Katherine Mansfield and John Middleton Murray moved twelve times in three years, June and Henry Miller nomadic in New York, Jean Rhys and whatever husband she had at the time, the Fitzgeralds, the Eliots. The Bowles of course. A whirlwind. But how do you feel steady when your bottom is always slipping out from under you? So restless, yes, a generation lost.

Rooms after rooms, shabby flats, like a Jean Rhys novel. Joseph Cornell's bird houses. The inscription of his "Penny Arcade Portrait of Lauren Bacall": "An insight into the lives of countless young women who never knew, or may never know, any other home than the plainest of furnished rooms in a drab hotel."

A sort of marital aviary. Vivien(ne)'s hawk nose, Tom's hawk eyes.

They stayed at Bertie's near the British museum, a convenient *ménage à trois*. (Always French, *ménage à trois, maladie à deux*.) Eliot slept in the hall on a chair. A third, to provide relief from themselves. Maybe Viv thought, why not? If I cannot be a Great Man I will fuck one.

Then a "cramped, noisy flat" near Paddington Station, 18 Crawford Mansions, Crawford Street, Marylebone.

We too lived near Paddington Station, all the wonders of W2. The first in a series of cramped rooms. The bed that folded out from the closet. The tiny schoolkid desk. We went to Woolworth's and bought cutlery, plates, two white teacups. Our married life in miniature. At night a pounding on the other side of the door. The constant tempo of the humping Spaniards.

Then a large room above a curry restaurant on Brick Lane in the

East End, past crowds of Jack the Ripper tours, near where Zelda donned men's clothes for a nighttime tour of the docks. Our neighborhood was known as "dodgy." The callers luring passers-by in to their curry houses, drunken American tourists, stag parties. Sometimes a drunken fight would break out into the streets, and we would watch by the windows as the bobbies arrived.

HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME — the barking refrain from "The Waste Land."

The Eliots lived across from a pub at their first flat on Crawford Street. Tom complained about the actresses playing the phonograph. They entertained each other with cruel cariatures of their beastly neighbors. Vivien(ne) would mimic their Cockney accents. "Well you see, Sir, it's the artistic temperament. We ordinary folks must learn to make allowances for artists. They're not the same as us." Said their landlord, unironically.

The noise on Brick Lane was fragmenting, obscene. We had to leave.

Their move to a more spacious abode at 9 Clarence Gate Gardens, a large Victorian building close to Regents Park. It was where they stayed unhappily the rest of their marriage, editing *The Criterion*, where she later lived alone, his photographs on the wall. Our Room #3 was also close to Regent's Park, had the same "dark carpeted staircases" and "jangling lifts" of the Eliots' earlier "Mansions," as Viv derisively put it in a story. Another institutional tomb. A card table for a dining table. The bed actually two mattresses piled on top of each other.

They're going to knock the whole building down, you know. An elderly woman wanders into our apartment as we're moving in. She is Ruth Gordon in *Rosemary's Baby*. I am spooked Mia. John is at the British Library finishing his thesis.

In 1918, Viv writes in a letter that "life is so feverish and yet so dreary at the same time, and one is always waiting, waiting for something. Generally waiting for some particular strain to be over. One thinks, when this is over, I will write."

Vivien(ne) always frantically looking for a place outside of London, a nice cottage perhaps, looking to escape the trauma of the Blitz (never being able to escape the trauma of life itself, of her marriage, a melodrama played out on her body).

Then, the terrorist attacks of 7/7, the evacuation of our local tube station where a bomb was supposed to go off, we watch the hysteria on the TV at the nearby dormitory for international students. A framed photograph of the Captain, as Eliot liked to be called, when he moved to his secret lodgings on Charing Cross Road, hangs near the snack station. The bloated, later Eliot, soon on to Wife #2, daughter-

figure, secretary. (Viv also was his secretary, there she is in their Paddington flat, with her Corona typewriter, she is posed in profile, hands on hips.)

We lay on our lumpy bed and hold each other, feeling panicked against the stoic Englishness around us, a badge of pride since the Blitz and the IRA, a sort of emotional imperialism that Viv also experienced. Only the foreigners seem completely freaked out.

2009

My morning has already been torn to shreds, my sanity thin, I am fearful I will not be able to collect the fragments of the afternoon, to quote Eliot, in his poem "Hysteria," his short prose poem depicting the grotesque figure of a woman, modeled on Vivien(ne). The speaker of the poem trying to escape from the horrors of the woman's body/ presence/most importantly voice, a *grande guignol* of femininity personified by her terrifying laughter, the caverns of her throat. A poem written just before their marriage.

Noise has always had the ability to destroy my day, the possibility of my writing. I share this with hysterics and paranoid schizophrenics. I share this with Schreber. The voices, the voices, they still worm through.

Akron refers to itself as the "Rubber Capital of the World," for its now atrophied tire and rubber industries. The Goodyear blimp often circling slowly above. There is no insulation between walls in this building. Downstairs, destruction workers are drilling, laughing cavalierly. They have the radio on. My next-door neighbors have also decided to get a monster puppy, a mammoth puppy, who bounds up and down the wooden floors and emits constant shrill, nervous yelps.

Eliot was exquisitively sensitive to noise.

She was exquisitively sensitive.

I am inheriting the puppy's hysteria. I wear the noise on my shattered body. I hold in my palms my waxen medicine-blue earplugs. I show them to my neighbor. She teaches undergraduate art history part-time at Kent State University. Her boyfriend has scruffy facial hair. They grew up around here, they go to their parents, I imagine, when they disappear with the dog on Sundays. Once, she squealed with excitement when she got her copy of *Martha Stewart Living*: "Martha is here!"

Our neighbors have heard us fight loudly through the walls, often during the process of editing something I've written, usually the catalyst for most of our fights, that and moving. Sometimes high melodrama, my operatic roars, the sounds of books being thrown (nothing riles him more than me throwing library books). They have heard us fuck loudly through the walls, sometimes right after one of

our apocalyptic fights.

She is worked up too, stressed. I am still shaking from the experience. I want to say: I will never fuck again, never operate the blender, never set an alarm — just shut the fuck up. Please. I am begging you. But I don't.

It's just a puppy. She says to me, exasperated. It's an energetic puppy.

And I am fetal. I do not resist. My home is under siege. My body is under siege. The terror of the birds outside in the trees. I am Tippi Hedren.

I think of one of my favorite opening passages, from Anna Kavan's *Who are You?*, a paean to madness brought on by noise, the ability of sound to destroy the self. The title comes from the monotonous cries of the "brain-fever birds," which Kavan characterizes as an assault on identity, forming an ominous chorus for the main character's breakdown:

All day long, in the tamarinds behind the house, a tropical bird keeps repeating its monotonous cry, which consists of the same three inquiring notes. Who-are-you? Who-are-you? Who-are-you? Loud, flat, harsh and piercing, the repetitive cry bores its way through the ear-drums with the exasperating persistence of a machine that can't be switched off.

Birds that often occupy Kavan's nightmare landscapes of hallucinations and delirium — nature in general has a way of turning sinister in her narratives, like her apocalyptic grass in *A Bright Green Field* or ice in her dystopic masterpiece *Ice*.

I attempt to drown it all out with Arvo Pärt. (Choral, chloral.) Yet I am drowning.

And now the queer symphony of the barking squirrels.

I begin to escape to a study room in the university library to get away from the destruction workers. Room 376A. The same room every time. A battered desk. A menagerie of those institutional sickly sort of fabric chairs. But I can think now, I can channel my voices. I begin to return to a fictional notebook I call *Mad Wife* that I started trying to write when I first began reading the biographies. A woman trapped inside her home haunted by the mad wives of modernism. Anaïs Nin who told her husband Hugo that her journals were the fictional diary of a possessed woman.

Of course I can never figure out the form. I can never manage to finish it, but still it obsesses me. I who devour these lives. I who Bovarize. Emma who too felt an "ardent veneration for illustrious or ill-fated women."

When Victorian readers first read "The Yellow Wallpaper" they placed it within the whole Gothic, haunted house tradition. Simply a

tale of a creepy madwoman unraveling. But it is in fact another sort of ghost story.

I too am interested in ghost stories. A collective history of ghosts.

I begin to cannibalize these women, literally incorporating them, their traumas, an uncanny feeling of repeating, of reliving.

I am in bed downed by something like a sinus infection. Channeling, channeling, always, I am Simone Weil, although Simone Weil pushed bravely past her sinus headaches, working in the fields and organizing worker protests, and writing her crystalline philosophical texts in her notebooks, while at the slightest hint of sinus troubles I dive under the covers. I am the exact opposite of Simone Weil. More Sylvia or Vivien(ne), also with their chronic sinusitis.

I am in the bed playing with books. I am an invalid voluptuary. I give myself permission to flip because I am sick, I cannot delve into anything too deeply.

Of course in a way this is a good day. I am still attempting to work. Other days, more days than I'd like to admit, I do not exist at all. Don't want to exist. Can only exist through screens, other people's lives. When I am the high priestess of Catatonia.

The scrap of Nicole's letter from *Tender is the Night*, probably pirated from Zelda: "I am not going to write you anymore. I am too unstable."

What has been omitted? What has been scratched out? Days, lives, wives.

(They couldn't write because alone in a room they were shadows. And at the end, they were alone in a room.)

On the phone, on his lunch break, John plays Savior. Sometimes he uses the language of willpower. You need to snap yourself out of it. Don't you see I am ill, I am sick sick sick. Sinuses. Or synapses something. I threaten at times to surrender myself to the mental ward, to the gods of Lithium and Zoloft and lock and key. I throw tantrums. It is an empty threat, a manipulation — he is more virulently against psychiatric intervention than even I am. Yet sometimes that too feels like a bind. Is the illness invisible or imagined?

Days it takes the jaws of life to get me out of bed. He tries different tacks. He wrestles me or cajoles me lovingly into the shower. He walks me. He waters me. Like a dog or a plant.

(How we can infantilize each other. We are each other's babies. Baby. We say. We play good and bad mommies. Good and bad daddies.)

Is it as bad as all that? I suppose it is. I wonder when the fog will lift, if the fog will lift. I am supposed to keep calm. Just like the

heroine in “The Yellow Wallpaper.” Must not be overwrought. Beyond the melancholy and fatigue there are the (accompanying?) physical disturbances. The sinus pain. The terrible stomach spasms, acid reflux, irritable bowel. (Viv’s, Zelda’s explosive colitis.)

I have been told by my family doctor in Akron who resembles Orville Redenbacher that I have caused this bodily coup through emotional stress (he is so certain of this). So I am bitter as the bile I taste at John. I am ordered to eat only bland foods, nothing that makes the tedium a little less oppressive.

Leonard Woolf was the documentarian of his wife’s illness. “Leonard made Virginia’s illness one of his life’s works…” Extensive “entries on her daily states of mind are coded in Tamil and Sinhalese.” Scott’s life ledger, his meticulous coding of Zelda’s days. Tom writing of the state of Viv’s bowels vividly in letters. These men were caretakers of their invalid wives. They elaborately recorded their wives’ symptomry.

John who wifes me, who Leonard Woolfs me. He who enabled her. Her continued genius was the centerpiece of their life together. (Did he also disable her?) Paul on Jane: “Our combined world orbited around the subject of her poor health. Each week she seemed to have a new symptom to add to the old ones; the horizon of her illness was slowly widening.”

My invalid dependent wife

T.S. Eliot repeated this over and over again in his letters. Ad nauseum (oh yes, the nausea). He exaggerated Vivien(ne)’s symptoms, confused them at times with his own. But he was the Great Poet, she merely a sick woman. As if planning a future, escape route, corralling sympathies. Even though she too nursed him through his maladies.

“The emphasis was always on Vivien’s illnesses, which appear mysterious.”

Colitis, fever, migraines, rashes, insomnia, exhaustion, cloudiness — but how to separate the cure from the disease? Hallucinations from the bromides and chloral, given in huge draughts to make women walk around like zombies. (Prince Chloral, Virginia dubbed these woozy visions.)

My irritable bowel. My raging periods. My howling headaches. Our maladies speak crassly and loudly for us when we are supposed to be calm.

Perhaps I am not just Emma, sensualist, solipsist. I am also the first Mrs. Bovary — Yes more love! More tonic and more love! Mme. Bovary #1’s crime seems to be her nerves and lack of style. The shawl over her bony shoulders, her skirts too short.

The first Madame Bovary…the first Mrs. Rochester…the first Mrs. Eliot. So much of Viv’s story like Bertha Mason’s — the brother-

betrayer scheming with the husband, all the Darwinian discourse around inheritance and lunatic women.

Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* described by Rochester as the "true daughter of an infamous woman." Insanity thought to be hereditary, passed down from mother to daughter. Virginia and Viv encouraged not to have children.

(I think of all that we have inherited.)

The narrative told about Vivien(ne) is that she was delicate, the sickly sort. She had been told this from childhood. Jane Bowles sickly too after having TB of the knee. As a teenager she recovered in a Swiss sanitorium. Viv also had childhood TB of the bone.

Her messy periods, a sign of feminine disorder in the 19th century. (In order to ensure normalcy, periods were often delayed as much as possible using a range of remedies, including cold showers.)

Corset and corsetting. Jane and Viv. The nervous girls. Stress cadets. They felt it all so intensely on their body. Both married men who grew icy or paralyzed the more feverish and effusive their wives got. (He is cold on the phone. I grow hot. He freezes up.)

A young Jane Bowles so bourgie and pampered, in her prim little dresses, her hat and gloves (she'd forget them in the cab on the way to the Village). Bendel's and Bergdorf Goodman. A maid who changed her pocketbooks. Her nails and hair done twice a week. The Haigh-Woods (Viv's family) wearing full-dress tuxes to dinner, supping solemnly on soup (well, if you believe the film version). I am trying to conjure up an atmosphere of oppression. Of being good. Of being silenced. The "half-confinement" of the hysterics Cixous writes about.

Their panopticon mothers. They never let them out of their sight for long. Admonishing them to be good, to behave. And perhaps one got married to escape one's childhood, one's family. To escape one's mother. For a sense of adventure. Through marriage, not war or kingmaking. And then to find oneself right back in, perhaps worse. The husband is also a father. To act out — what does that even mean? It sounds suspiciously like *acting* (as oppposed to being passive, a doll). Created as characters. They learn to play a role. The spastic girls.

"Moreover, Rose told Vivienne, as she gave her her 'doses,' that she was sick. The label seemed to fit, and increasingly Vivie acted out this role by indulging in temperamental outbursts and crying fits."

Virginia and Vivien(ne) were told by their families and their doctors that they suffered from "moral insanity," a label often assigned to girls who somehow rebelled against their confined gender role (often promiscuity, in behavior or in one's body maturing early).

All these theories of what to do with bad girls, to rewrite and name the narrative (everything then becomes symptomatic not of

their conditions but of the illness). It was the EGO that was thought to get in the way of smoothing back into one's accepted social role and creating such chaotic unhappiness. Bad to have an ego. One must exercise self-control.

In his *History of Madness*, Michel Foucault traces how in the 17th century, the beginning of the so-called Age of Reason, madness became an object to consider, categorize, and classify, as opposed to an experience. The discourse around madness gradually became less one of criminality (the solution being physically restraining bodies in the asylum) than one of morality, disciplining and controlling minds and passions while in confinement. By the end of the 19th century the moral discourse became wrapped around a medical discourse. Under Phillippe Pinel's control the French asylum espoused physical discipline and a detailed schedule as a way to become well again. This philosophy of *traitement morale*, or moral management.

This idea that one must control oneself and stop being so FULL of self remains a dominating theory around mental illness, and, perhaps tellingly, around other patriarchal laws and narratives, including the ones governing and disciplining literature.

A woman of the Victorian period saw "nerve specialists" who named them as nervous, neurasthenic, having had a "nervous breakdown," slightly depressed, melancholy or hysterical. "The Yellow Wallpaper" is Charlotte Perkins Gilman's merciless take-down of the law-making patriarchs with their control of the language, both Husband and Herr Doktors (and all of the men are doctors in the story). In this way it's a companion text to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, also a takedown of the medicine men who do ruin instead of good. Both Gilman and Woolf (and Vivien(ne)) were diagnosed and treated in the context of the 19th century language of nerves. (Woolf also mocks doctors and their uninspired language in *Mrs. Dalloway*, her physician George Savage in particular.)

Before (and after) the talking cure, a whole range of treatments and types of doctors were thrown at these nervous women. A series of specialists and experimental routines. Pseudo-science and magic men and witch doctors. The gland specialist. The one who kept Viv on a diet of fruit and water. One particular Bloomsbury quack whose injections turned out to be nothing but milk. A Spartan diet, special exercises, enemas for constipation. She was told to stand daily on her head.

Compose yourself. Compose yourself. They are supposed to hold it in. To not act out. Dear, one must not create a scene. The discipline and containment of diagnosis. A diagnostic label becomes a sort of straitjacket — one learns to self-discipline, to watch over oneself for signs of dis-ease, and any symptoms are read through this filter

(energy is suspect, excitability is to be dulled down, how did they get up the nerve to *do* anything, let alone write?).

She is simultaneously pathologized and dismissed. You are sick. You are acting hysterical. There's nothing wrong with you. It's all in your head. Romance novel readers call this "wallpapering," after the story.

The narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" notes that she takes pains to control herself and controlling herself makes her feel even more fatigued. Gilman's doctor was the famous Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell whose grand idea was the "rest cure," and the story is a parody of the effects of such a cure.

Silas Weir Mitchell, the neurologist who once opined, "The man who does not know sick woman does not know woman." A continuance of a deep-bred ideology since antiquity that women were mad by their very nature (primitive, emotional, weak, hysteria coming from the Greek *hystera* for womb).

Mitchell's whole idea was that women got sick because they were trying to be like men when really they should be kept in an infantile state. So neurasthenics were sent to a nursing home, expected not to stir, to sleep abundantly, to drink great quanties of milk and red meat for weight gain, and to avoid any stimulation or excitement. Women were pushed into the feminine role (housewife, mother), men into the masculine one (being a good father and provider, picking up sports), because of this belief that illness came from deviating from one's natural sex role. They were all prescribed sedatives as well.

Woolf was often sent to these nursing homes, which she found unbearable and usually exacerbated her depression.

In 1970, at a meeting before the American Psychological Association, a mostly male audience of psychologists, feminist psychologist Phyllis Chesler asked for one million dollars in reparations for women who had been "punitively labeled, overly tranquilized, sexually seduced while in treatment, hospitalized against their wills, given shock therapy, lobotomized, and above all, unnecessarily described as too aggressive, promiscuous, depressed, ugly, old, fat, or incurable." The audience sat there in silence. Maybe they thought it was a joke.

Could it be anxiety? In Chicago, soon after returning from London I began seeing a French doctor. Dr. Bruno. I chose him solely because he is French. It made it easier to select a doctor from the enormous hmo list provided by the insurance company. I thought a French doctor would be more willing to see me, somehow.

I was obviously wrong.

Dr. Bruno is short and stubby. I tell him "I am a writer." (Must

stop telling people this). “I write too,” he says.

Everyone is working on a novel. My doctor is working on a novel, a fellow adjunct, a silver-haired art historian, is working on a novel. About a silver-haired art historian/spy.

Could it be anxiety? my French doctor muses in his French way. I call him this week to complain of fatigue, swollen glands.

I don’t know. It could be, I say. I am desperate. It has been well-documented that women are diagnosed more because they are trained to be help-seekers. SOS. Save me from myself.

He prescribes Xanax. Little peach pills.

“My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad.” Diagnosed with nerves, with old-fashioned neurasthenia. A recent headline, trumpeting from the science page of *The New York Times*: “Is Hysteria Real? Brain Images Say Yes.” Good to know.

Should I be worried about side effects? He waves his hand, disparagingly.

(After weeks on the benzos, I wean myself off, and the withdrawal is terrible, the shakes, the paranoia, the panic attacks.)

Vivien(ne) was 16 when her mother turned to the family doctor to control her. Doses of bromides for “hysterics.” Hoffman’s anodyne, dissolved in ether. Her breath always stank of it. A vampiric vibe. Along with the white makeup to cover up the spots caused by the bromides.

“And so the process of tranquillising Vivienne began.”

For Viv and Zelda: chloral hydrate ovarian extracts dried thyroid gland powders

Zelda was injected with her own blood and a “serum made from the blood of a mentally stable person.”

Also: belladonna luminal morphine stromium digitalis

hydrotherapy:

purges

wet packs

insulin therapy (used for female patients, “realigned behavior”)

ECT

coma therapy

Virginia: teeth pulling veronal adalin chloral hydrate paraldehyde potassium bromide digitalis

Dr. Bruno relaxes. He leans back in his chair. “Tell me, do you enjoy the novels of Julian Barnes?”

I find myself cycling through them. A form of possession.

The Vivien(ne) possession is a bit like being Linda Blair in *The Exorcist*.

I act like a demon woman. The *dybbuk*, a doubling.

She would grow violent at the stone walls he erected, her Lloyd's of London banker. He becomes the Great Debater. The Eternal Skeptic. What are we fighting about? Usually about my need to escape. To get out of here (wherever here is at the present time). To some mythical New York, most likely.

The moment I grow violent, in any way — slapping him on the shoulder, throwing a book, throwing my phone, telling him to FUCK OFF — he has won and I have lost. Because now he can point to the violent me as the monstrous thing.

What do I lose? I lose myself.

(I hate that there is this role, the mad wife. And I hate when I play it.)

A definition, I think, of being oppressed, is being forbidden to externalize any anger.

I am beginning to realize that the patriarch decides on the form of communication. Decides on the language. The patriarch is the one who rewrites.

How did you inherit such violence? he asks. He is laughing. It is the way he unconsciously defends himself from conflict. When I exhibit intense emotion.

"The Sibyl, with frenzied mouth uttering things not to be laughed at, unadorned and unperfumed, yet reaches to a thousand years with her voice by aid of the god."

It is this laughter that destroys me. "John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage," writes the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper."

But he is violent too. "In masculine hands logic is often a form of violence, a sly kind of tyranny," writes Simone de Beauvoir. He tears me into rags and rages.

The Eliots' violent fights in public. She liked to humiliate him in front of strangers. In one of Vivien(ne)'s stories her heroine Sibylla throws parcels down the stairs. "She hits Andre on the face with her umbrella. Having done it once she does it again. The whole world totters — it spins about her. She longs to destroy herself and looks wildly about but there is no window low enough from which to cast herself, no knife or weapon presents itself for her purpose."

The hysteria of the marital fight — grabbing for any convenient weapon to use against oneself or against each other.

In one manuever I pantomine suicide — opening the window and making motions to climb out until John grabs me, embarrassed people might be watching. We are only on the second floor, he reminds me.

I think of Virginia: "A wife like I am should have a label to her cage. She bites!"

Yes, yes, that old familiar violence. No word or touch can cool it.

In Leonard Woolf's intricate documentation of his wife's moods, he repeatedly uses the word "violence," Woolf's biographer, Hermione Lee, observes. "She was occasionally violent with her nurses" "violent excitement" "violently hostile to me." He doesn't distinguish between behavior and the effects of her treatment which influenced her behavior (the prescribed "hypnotics" which in large quantities can lead to all the symptoms of mania).

"His language makes a deliberate effort to be unemotional, but uses terms like 'raving mad' and 'insanity,' 'loss of control,' 'incoherent,' and above all 'violent,' which seems involuntarily to introduce a code of reasonable standards of behavior versus intolerable lapses."

Leonard Woolf's notes on Virginia mirror Freud and Breuer's case study of the teenage hysteric they named Anna O. In one state melancholy and anxious, in the other "she hallucinated and was 'naughty'—that is to say, she was abusive…" Tearing buttons. Throwing things. Freud calls these rages "absences"—as if she was absent from her self. It must be illness, this violence. No other way to explain losing one's shit. Although her life was one of monotony. A caretaker for her father. Such a bright girl so fucking BORED. (And yet this ennui was read as a sign of her hysteria, Dora's deemed *tedium vitae*, also her "hysterical unsociability").

In some ways socially sanctioned "illness" was the only way for HER to ever go outside the strict boundaries of behavior, to freak out, to lose it a little, to protest (although the protest was often silent and incredibly painful). She doubles herself — the angel, the monster. Of course the violence is then muted — she turns it on herself.

Compose yourself. Compose yourself. They are supposed to hold it in. To control themselves. Perhaps the fury is one's own containment. If one wasn't so contained, one wouldn't be so furious.

"I found the emotionless condition a great strain, all the time. I used to think I should burst out and scream and dance," writes Vivien(ne).

HE DO THE POLICE IN DIFFERENT VOICES

A high percentage of female artists and writers were labeled hysterics: "…doctors had noticed hysteria was apt to appear in young women who were especially rebellious." They are the disliked "difficult" patients, the early precursor of the female schizophrenic or BPD girl, as opposed to the lovely, enervated neurasthenic.

Schizophrenia originally called *dementia praecox*. That *praecox feeling*, an annoyance or revulsion towards a patient that was seen as diagnostic.

Still now, a discomfort with a woman who rages.

Better to call the fury "The Thing." It is the illness talking. It is

allowed if we call it a possession — a spinning head. When she uses nasty language, when she throws a scene.

Where is it supposed to go? All of this fury? A woman's anger: it must be contained, repressed, diffused.

Maybe Emma B. is pissed off. So instead of destroying something (not permissible) she sets off to systematically self-destruct. Or to try to live intensely. Or perhaps those are the same things.

Maybe these women were furious.

(She is mad, yes, but she is also ANGRY.)

What to make of Virginia Woolf's insistence in *Room* that the "red light" of anger actually blocks a clear and receptive mind and hence thwarts good writing? When it is her political take-down of the lawmakers that gives *Mrs. Dalloway* its bite, or again in *Room*, the sneer against all of the Professor Xs.

Although Woolf perennially enacted such fury and revolt in her personal life, she obviously internalized the current ideology of mental illness, made clear in her thesis against anger in *Room*. Perhaps this is also why she distanced herself from the sickly, intense wife of the American poet. Viv is the id she wants to avoid, Tom the superego.

Also an internalizing of T.S. Eliot's correcting philosophies. One must not act out in excess. The objective correlative. Not only how women should behave, but how *writing* should behave. Writing should be composed. Should be transcendent. In the calm communion with and recognition of one's ancestors. And one has to somehow sacrifice the suffering man to make great art, to transcend one's own state. There is some of this in Woolf's concept of transcendence in art. In opposition Viv, the wife not the writer, the clever dilettante, was seen as all excess of emotions. Doomed to thingness, to the body, to immanence. Reduced to her blood, her bowels, her body. A tortured Molly Bloom, wondering at her hole.

I am also in communion with my ancestors. Writing towards these women is like engaging in a seance. I put pictures of my criminals on my wall, like Jean Genet in his jail cell in *Our Lady of the Flowers*. At night I love them and my love fills them with life.

When I moved to Akron I suddenly became fascinated with the Papin Sisters, those good girls who snapped and murdered their bourgeois mama-employer and the employer's daughter. The two sisters, Christine and Léa, so connected they began to blot out the outside world. There was the alpha sister, who apparently said upon being carried away: In another life I must have been my sister's husband! Then they became more estranged — the one grew more mad while the other more repressed, and by that I mean more sane. This reminds me of Eliot in his cool monk's tower, Viv raging. The

elder sister completely unraveled, died inside the asylum, while the other moved out, became a maid again (a *bonne*, a good woman), lived with their dreaded mother.

Their policeman who was named Deleuze.

Everyone was obsessed with them, even de Beauvoir and her lover Sartre (who saw them as victims of class warfare). Genet conjured them up in his play *The Maids*. The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan used them for his case study of the paranoaic published in the Surrealist journal *Minotaure*. He made much of their brutal act of tearing out their victims' eyes.

Their Before and After pictures published in the main Surrealist journal. Before they are smooth good girls dressed in white, the pictures of industriousness, innocence. Afterwards they are as cross-eyed as Lucia Joyce, hair wild, dressed only in their kimonos.

This fascination coupled with revulsion once the feminine mask falls off. The Before and After of screen siren Frances Farmer, first golden curled careful locks then later, a defiant, drowned rat.

The actress Frances Farmer arrested for disorderly conduct, who was carried away kicking and screaming bellowing *have you ever had a broken heart*. She who put down "cocksucker" as her career.

The Surrealists cast as their heroines French girl-criminals like the Papin Sisters as well as the hysterics, like Charcot's actress Augustine. The girl-criminals' protest and revolt — they put up a good fight. (And yet Augustine was also often so malleable, spasming so willingly for the cameras, the crowds.)

Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément wrangling over Freud's hysteric, her *petite hysterie*, in their dialogue in "The Newly Born Woman." Does Cixous valorize Dora and not appreciate her suffering, as Clément argues? "Dora broke something," Cixous tells Clément, who is not convinced. "Listen, you love Dora, but to me she never seemed a revolutionary character," she says. Cixous responds, hilariously, "I don't give a damn about Dora; I don't fetishize her. She is the name of a certain force, who makes the little circus not work anymore."

Cixous who writes elsewhere: "The hysterics are my sisters."

What did these women break except themselves? They who were ultimately contained.

Can I read these Sibyls as anything other than a cautionary tale?

Zelda burning her clothes in a bathtub, incensed about Scott's infatuation for Hollywood ingenue Lois Moran. That scene in Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*, the mad wife character, Nicole, throws a "scene" in the bathroom that we can only eavesdrop on (the Lois Moran figure, Rosemary Hoyt, is disturbed by the noise, "louder and louder, a verbal inhumanity"). Control yourself! her husband/

psychiatrist Dick is overheard saying to her. (We do not see the monster on the page. She is off-scene, like in much of *Jane Eyre*.)

Once Viv threw her nightdress out the window in frustration. Lucia Joyce institutionalized for throwing a chair. An empty revolt, says Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. "The boy can become a subject, the girl knows she cannot, she is just doomed to throw things in rage." Banging around the walls of the cage, not really trying to get out of it. "The girl rebels against her future enslavement through her present powerlessness; and her vain outbursts, far from freeing her from her bonds, often merely restrict her even more."

The Papin Sisters' fits of frenzied violence followed by amnesia.

He is sent to sleep on the couch. Me kicking him out. Out. Out. He sleeps it off. I am still spinning, spinning.

After one of our incendiary fights I cannot write anything at all.

"Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences," Freud tells us. Memory as a form of suffering. When it is easier to forget. Freud titles Dora's case study "Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria."

I cannot write when I am in such a state of mind, a state only he can catalyze. And then I am a mute-child, I retreat into passivity. It is the poison, the poison that eats at me. He lets me into his arms and forgives me, but I have lost another life.

He will go to his library. He will read books. He will live life surrounded by books. He will live life among old pages and words, words, words. I am ruined from writing.

The obliteration of their feuds. Their quotidian torments. Daily murders.

These domestic storms are now rare, occasional. But still they have the power to destroy. It can take a day of clean-up.

It's amazing to me that someone who is usually such a supportive, stabilizing presence in my life the majority of the time can occasionally be so destabilizing, so fragmenting.

(He was able to escape their burning building unharmed. She self-immolated.)

I keep on typing the same typo: not obliterate but *obliterature*.

He too feels guilty afterwards. He is mortified at his training. The role he has been assigned to play in this domestic drama. I erase you, he says. That's the worst thing I can do, is erase you.

For I must remember, John is not Tom Eliot. John is not Leonard Woolf. We might slip into these roles, we might play these ghosts, but we have become aware of this. Even if we cannot control ourselves at the time. I attempt to use language. I point out his invalidating rhetoric. He tries to listen. We try to learn.

It has been painted, by Eliot's biographers, that Viv was in fact the vampire who sucked Tom dry. Tom. Poor Tom. Peter Ackroyd: "I

believe he went toward her with a kind of child-like trust." Another biography: "Eliot met the girl who was to plow up, harrow and strip his life to the bone." The femme fatale, the succubus. The castrating female.

Yet, HE was able to descend upon their marriage like a detached ethnographer. Their marriage produced the state of mind that catalyzed "The Waste Land," Tom has said. (Her state of mind got her put away.) Not the incandescent state of mind that produces great literature, as Virginia Woolf opines, but one that was able to look down upon the car crash and take notes.

"He was one of those poets who live by scratching, and his wife was his itch," wrote Virginia.

"Your job will be to suppress everything suppressible." This is what Tom said years later to John Hayward, his literary executor, longtime intimate and roommate. Viv was long gone by then. I think of this statement as the ethos of the modernist patriarchs and of New Criticism. Drain her of her life juices, then throw away her exquisite corpse. Don't let them find the bodies. Take out anything that can be verified or named.

From Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent": "What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."

In the artist and sacrifice, who (or what) is sacrificed?

He fed the flames in which she threw herself full-force. She fed his writing.

Viv too was drained, and afterwards, she had nothing to show for it. No Name. No Nobel Prize. Aren't vampires the ones who become immortal?

He made use of the "marriage material." A bedsheet stained with Vivien(ne)'s blood that so horrified him. She bought black satin bedsheets to disguise the blood, black satin pajamas for him and her. She would steal the bedsheets from the hotel and send them back later, laundered.

"In *The Sheltering Sky*, at a time of acute stress for himself, Paul had been able to make use of the marriage material and to use it artistically as a point of departure for the work. But to him *The Sheltering Sky* was fiction, not life. What he had written he felt had no real connection between Jane and himself. Jane, however, had taken it as prophecy. She could make no distinction between the life and the work, in that the one predicted the other."

Jane who became convinced that Paul had indeed written her glorious novel *Two Serious Ladies*. Thirty years of writer's block.

Scott too made use of the "marriage material." Leonard Woolf's

autobiographies. A bedsheet held up to the world.

Sometimes soon after our epic fights I get my period. What a humiliating denouement. Somehow tempering what I feel certain is my justified rage.

And the Papin Sisters were on their menstrual periods, allegedly. THEY WEAR THE RED GARBS OF CRIMINALS. A line reworked from *The Maids*. Hormones also blamed for Sylvia offing herself as well: It was all PMS! I once read in an article. How humiliating.

Can you imagine? She is bleeding Ophelia, not a tortured Hamlet. All of Vivien(ne)'s problems always blamed on her menstrual periods. Virginia too had difficult periods.

One day a seething thing. The next a cramped girl-child moaning while John brings me tea. What Simone de B calls the half-alienation of a woman.

The Michael Hastings film, *Tom and Viv*, pins the Eliots' train-wreck of a marriage almost entirely on Viv's hormones and drug use. From the IMDB description of *Tom and Viv* stickered on my Netflix envelope: "In 1915, T.S. (Tom) Eliot and Vivienne Haigh-Wood elope, but her longstanding gynecological and emotional problems disrupt their planned honeymoon."

That second failed honeymoon at the sea. That scene in the film. The red-stained white sheet in the honeymoon suite. Miranda Richardson in her flapper bob is on her knees: I disgust you. She internalizes this shame, like she is some aberrant criminal. Willem Dafoe as proper Tom is absolutely mortified. He flees the scene. The film is awful caricature, but so is much of the Eliot mythography. From Vivien(ne)'s biography: "While a distraught Vivien locked herself in her bedroom and apparently damaged the room." It's confusing. Seriously, it's some blood. (What is Eliot's objective correlative here?) As confusing as Rochester explaining to Jane Eyre that his first wife Bertha turned out to be vulgar and sluttish, and we're supposed to believe this gives him some moral license to lock her up in the attic.

Flaubert thought his mistress and confidante, the poet and artist's model Louise Colet, was vulgar as well. She was known in the artistic circles of 19th century Paris as the Muse. He wrote to her: "Don't you feel everything is currently dissolving into the humid element — tears, chatter, breast-feeding. Contemporary literature is drowning in women's menses."

Oh, the mess. The fucking mess. Maybe that's it. The untidiness of it all. The threat that spills out. The excess that cannot be cleaned up, controlled. And yet Eliot channeled this excess, his horror of it.

In his poem "Ode" written three years after his marriage, maybe

circling around that traumatic scene: “When the bridegroom smoothed his hair / There was blood upon the bed.” He was horrified by her repulsive femininity. Its excesses. Her brother to Michael Hastings in an interview: “Viv’s sanitary towels always put a man off.” Embedded in this is the idea that a woman is nature, violence, instability. Hysterical — originating from her womb. (The chanting of “Ode”: “Succaba eviscerate/Torturous.”) Succuba — the first wife, like Lilith. She is a demon, bent on unmanning him. Clytaemnestra paving Agamemnon’s murderous homecoming with crimson tapestries. He the Fisher King. These figures continue in “The Waste Land.” All the violence of the act. Raped Philomela with her tongue torn out.

Eliot’s ancestors who judged the witches at Salem.

All these literary patriarchs who thought they were doctors too. A corroboration.

Tom asked Leonard, Virginia’s husband, whether he should give Viv writing exercises, if that would help her spirits. (I’m sure Virginia loved the comparison.) Viv who possessed such a wit and talent for words. Leonard said yes, but not to overdo it. He kept his wife on a strict diet of writing only one hour a day, following the advice of her doctors, when she was recovering from an episode, or a breakdown.

Illness marked a pause in her writing, noted one of Virginia’s biographers. Partly self-censorship, a desire to scratch out one’s days, most likely also this strict regimen (she was now watched over, disciplined).

She was advised to spend four hours a day gardening.

Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell, who believed strongly that to be a happy woman, to not be nervous, one must “live as domestic a life as possible” and “never touch pen, brush, or pencil as long as you live.” This is the advice he gave Charlotte Perkins Gilman. The character in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is lectured to do nothing. No society, no work. (All I want to do is work, Zelda would beg in those last years.) The popular ideology of the time dictated that nervous ladies should not be overstimulated — that is what made them nervous to begin with. In the Victorian era it was thought detrimental for a woman (a wife) to have a lively imagination, to use her mind. This was thought to make her sick. A way to take away the power from the burgeoning New Woman with her desire and demand for public and personal freedoms, convince her she’s ill. To be seen primarily as an invalid is to be invalidated.

The woman in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is a writer. She writes as a means of survival. To fight against her utter isolation and invisibility. She keeps a journal she must hide.

Yet it’s so impossible to shut out all the voices. Not only: no one

will read you (Nietzsche: *non legor, non legar.*) But: you are mad. When you are told that you are ill, that is something you internalize. Days I worry, wonder — what if I'm not a writer? What if I'm a depressive masquerading as a notetaker? Is this the text of an author or a madwoman? It depends perhaps on who is reading it. Who has read it first. For once you are named it's almost impossible to struggle out from under the oppression of those categories — it is done, it is done at a price, and the price is daily, and it is on your head.

This is something Woolf was intimately familiar with — the threat always, of madness, of being read as mad, as incoherent. She distanced herself as much as possible. Tunneled her experiences of madness into her Septimus Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway*, his mad letters, not hers, not her. Septimus reflected her own fears of not being intelligible. Although of course she had also the experiences of Clarissa as the patient-patient, encouraged by her paternal husband to go to her womb-tomb of a child's room during the day to take a nap, the experience of being fragile in the air after days in a daze, after an extended illness. The contained Clarissa versus Septimus Smith — he is the one who jumps out of windows.

COMPOSE YOURSELF. What does this mean? You must COMPOSE YOURSELF. They were undisciplined women. That is the storyline. To be disciplined and write of the undisciplined.

My sisters, my mistresses, the spiders stalking the center of the web. I circle them, I weave their tales (or unweave the tales spun about them), I wrap my silken webs around them, I devour them. My black widows, sometimes they leave widowers, they hang themselves by their own threads.

When the shame and guilt sets in — they must distance themselves from their demon-others.

During the rest cure, women were completely isolated and weren't allowed to write — they were given little scraps of paper and little nubs of pencils, little supplicating messages like what Zelda wrote Fitzgerald in the asylum, censored, so women learned what to write, how to behave, often penitent, tranquilized, after an "attack."

From Virginia: "I want to see you, but this is best….It's all my fault…I am grateful and repentant." Also Virginia's wan, weak suicide letter. In the archives at the British Library. A scrap, like a furtive missive at a rest home. "I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been," she concludes. "You know I am ill and an endless drag on him," wrote Viv. Sylvia who writes, "Ted is my salvation. He is so rare, so special, how could anyone else stand me!" An apologia for their earlier scenes since censored.

I go see a therapist off the highway in nearby Canton, Ohio, who tells me I have an "adjustment disorder." She tells me this in the first

appointment after what is called a diagnostic interview, when I answer questions on a list. Crying jags. Yes. Throwing things. Yes. It's unnerving, this new model of your basic mall psychology, one goes to a therapist in distress, to be heard, to work something out, not to answer yes or no about family history, it is this feeling of being placed inside of a box, that makes me long for the patient-narrated model of the talking cure, however patriarchal. It makes me long for exorcisms, for at least the push of the priest's hands. She must diagnose me, she says, for insurance reasons. I go look up "adjustment disorder" online in the DSM-IV, the fourth version of the diagnostics manual that is the bible of psychiatric classification. According to it, I have exhibited "marked distress that is in excess of what would be expected from exposure to the stressor," that has caused a "significant impairment in social or occupational (academic) functioning," although at least my stressor is "identifiable." I am technically disordered but not really mad, at least not medically. It's temporary, instead of one of the other more stigmatized categories on the Axis I, which is why it's so often diagnosed. Yet I am mad, I am furious, I do not want to live here. Insurance will pay for therapy once a week. It will not pay to get me out of here. Co-pay of $30. For a limited time — five months only.

What is the purpose of all this labeling? Foucault writes that the category of madness was created through the gesture of confinement, in the so-called classical age, with the new hierarchy of reason. Initially a subject was labeled insane so as to be disciplined, criminalized, physically put away, and then brought to "reason." Derrida's binary of opposites (nature/society, insane/ sane, criminal/ citizen, woman/man, emotion/reason).

I use the term "madness" here to describe these women's alienation, because I see their breakdowns as a philosophical experience that is about the confinement, or even death, of the self. This gesture of confinement, of exclusion, occurs when we speak of and name the figures of literary modernism: Us versus Them. The mentally ill ones versus the geniuses. But who gets to decide?

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* confounds this separation — all the characters are at risk of slipping on that slippery surface of sanity, some are able to prevent the fall, to keep themselves upright. The most privileged characters of the novel are less likely to be viewed as mad, even if they have dark nights of the soul. The traditional wife and the soldier of the lower class are the most susceptible to being pathologized.

I roll this around in my mouth — adjustment disorder. A woman is supposed to adjust, to go with her husband. To be brought to reason. Zelda's reeducation program she underwent at the Swiss asylum. She needed to learn her role, to go back to being the good

wife, the good mother. And twice as many women are diagnosed with these vague adjustment disorders. I realize this therapist has probably never read Deleuze, or Foucault, or Elaine Showalter, I remember I am against psychiatry, I do not return.

I order up books in bulk from the university library (my romance novels I check out from our local public). The student workers always part annoyed and agog, that anyone could want to read so many books. I carry them home in grocery bags and surround myself with them in bed.

These library books are my culture here. I keep company with the women inside these pages. Women who often are also, somehow, prevented from writing. These women who existed inside the bed, the room, trapped inside the house. I attempt to resuscitate their lives.

Sometimes for fun I reread Freud's case studies of the hysterics. Like Hélène Cixous, I too read them like fiction. Well, they are fictions. They were made into fictions. These girls, like characters in a novel, were renamed, alienated from their former selves, mythologized. Bertha Pappenheim who Josef Breuer renamed Anna O. and later collaborated with Freud on her case study. Bertha Pappenheim, who later became an author and activist. But as the character Anna O., as the young girl, she still wrote, weaving her own fairytales, her own "private theatre," as the doctors observed. She narrated her life in different languages, English, French, or Italian, refusing her native tongue of German, babbling polyglottal and glorious. Her repetition: tormenting, tormenting.

Yet none of HER text survives. The hysteric is a writer who ultimately could not be. She nonetheless told stories.

That's what I need to do here. Tell their stories.

The pauses and gaps of Freud's hysterics. Anna O.'s aphonia. Perhaps the silence of the hysteric was a form of rebellion, of refusing to be raw material. The narrative must be coaxed out by her father-doctor-Master-Inquisitor, she must confess, this is the talking cure Anna O. herself named. The voice unedited, wild, wanting. The verbosity of Freud's madman Schreber (the author is the one who writes the case notes, coopting or contradicting the subject's intent).

She speaks the language of the unconscious — he translates her depths. A channeling, this doctor-patient relationship, like the medieval mystic who narrates her tale to her father-confessor (her words, he pins them down, edits them). Her disordered mind, her disordered talk. Freud focused on the fragmented and discontinuous narrative of Dora and the others, attempting to give her speech order, coherence. He writes a novel on her, she is his character: a case study. Converting a monologue of madness into one of reason, as Foucault

writes of the history of psychiatry.

The hysterics were Freud's ventriloquist acts. They were his miraculous girls sawed in half, broken, needing to be put back together again.

A rhythm of silence undercut by fervent utterings.

André Breton and Louis Aragon as medical students working with shellshocked soldiers, named hysteria the "greatest poetic discovery of the late 19th century."

Yet both the Surrealist aesthetic of automatic writing, as well as the theories of fiction that came out of modernism, seem to suggest that the woman's radical spoken utterances are not art or writing in and of themselves, rather that an author is needed to edit and repeat, to shape and discipline.

I am struck by how many feminist critics, in their theories of radical writing, have drawn on male, modernist, precursors, as opposed to the more neglected women writers of that same period, without much to say about the women vampirized within these texts. (Perhaps because there is something dangerous about resurrecting the figure of the woman from his manuscript, placing her in a context of history, memoir, that goes against so many theories of fiction, theories that HE wrote.) Julia Kristeva with her theory of the semiotic, which draws on Baudelaire and the French Symbolists, Hélène Cixous who reads Molly Bloom's monologue as an exemplar of her theories of *l'écriture féminine*.

L'écriture féminine, which has such a close link aesthetically to automatic writing — writing of and through the body, privileging the raw and emotional over masculine logic, and more than anything defined by VOICE. Speech—*Parole*. The criminal text. What Cixous calls *La Genet*, her name for the feminine outlaw writer, after the famous French writer and criminal, who wrote of social outlaws and misfits. Also a play on words, for *La Jeune Née*, the newly born woman. Yet whose voice? Whose body? For weren't these figures before they were fictionalized, vampirized, alive in some other material way?

Cixous sees Molly the character as writing on her body, an ecstatic *jouissance* that she reads as feminine, but she ignores the materiality *underneath* the text, the real, raw lives lived, bodies that suffered, were ultimately confined (the hysteric or wife's half-confinement, the madwoman's prison sentence). And yet she identifies with the character not the author in Freud's case study. She sees the hysterics as her sisters, but does not announce a sororal status with Molly Bloom. Molly Bloom who some say was inspired by Joyce's wife, Nora. (Nora, like in Ibsen's "A Doll House," the ultimate wife, "I lived by performing tricks for you, Torvald," Nora becomes Dora,

they, silenced explorers.)

Another muse for Joyce was his daughter Lucia, the flapper who studied modern dance, who shared Zelda's teacher, Madame Egorova. Lucia who was madly in love with Samuel Beckett. (Beckett was another master, who her father mentored, she could only be in his eyeline as a flitting, ephemeral, pretty girl quickly turned nuisance, he only eyes his ancestral line.) Her father who drew on her polyglottism from their nomadic life, for his work *Finnegans Wake*. She in the room with him, translating, helping him invent clever puns. Lucia who was later put away for throwing a chair, then diagnosed as schizophrenic. Lucia who cut the phone cords when the calls came in to congratulate her father for *Ulysses*' court victory. (I am the artist! she cried. Yet she is not. She and her texts spoken or written are illegitimate.)

I look at John's copy of "The Waste Land," his pencilled marginalia, Eliot's fishy senator face staring back at me from the cover. The feminine voices flitting through "The Waste Land" are incantations. Repetitive, rhythmic. Fragmented. "'My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me./ Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak.'" Writing as a nervous system, as Deleuze writes in his chapter "Hysteria" in his book on the painter Francis Bacon. To me the most glorious lines of the entire poem, the female voices that Eliot quotes from, vampirizes, is possessed by, then possesses. All excess of emotions that he both fetishizes on paper and disciplines and punishes in real life. She is his actress: "similar to certain hysterical types who also, upon any suggestion, enter into any role," as Nietzsche writes. Vivien(ne) was wonderful with voices, the rhythm of feminine speech. She who ventriloquized the Cockney for him, the actresses who lived across the street. She notated lines in the margins of the manuscript, yet her hands were cut off like Lavinia. Later like Philomela in the poem with her tongue cut off, muted yet screaming.

The chattering woman is the muse of modernism. Her talk that is represented as unconscious and intuitive and associative. He always accompanies her with a notepad. He copies down her "disordered" speech, and later he will use it to convict her.

Yesterday's hysteric becomes the modern period's schizophrenic girl. Elaine Showalter in *The Female Malady*, her feminist Foucauldian reading of women in the English asylum: "While the name of the symbolic female disorder may change from one historical period to the next, the gender asymmetry of the representational tradition remains constant." Even if it's a madman, Showalter theorizes, his madness is still read as feminine.

Surrealism's red-lipped Ophelias, consumptive and reckless. Nadja chattering in the back of a cab in Breton's novel bearing her name:

"You know, that's how I talk to myself when I'm alone, I tell myself all kinds of stories." In her journals Anaïs Nin writes of the speech of June Miller, Henry's wife, her feverish talk with its "nervous flow." A spinner of tales like the hysteric. "June was always telling stories; June with drugged eyes and a breathless voice." She and Henry both colonize June, used June for their fictions. In *Tropic of Cancer* Henry Miller changes her name to Mona: "I sit down beside her and she talks — a flood of talk. Wild consumptive notes of hysteria, perversion, leprosy." In the novel the women he meets tell him their sob stories, he records their "neurasthenic" talk. He writes what Anaïs called his "Cunt Portraits," channeling their hysteria as his chosen aesthetic: "I love the words of hysterics and the sentences that flow on like dysentery and mirror all the sick images of the soul."

Tropic of Cancer reads as an incantation, especially the ecstatic manifesto on writing in the rush of the last pages, all destructive, yes Dionysian, like the god Bataille worshipped in his *Acéphale* society. Henry Miller as an American Surrealist engaging in glorious, glittering, automatic, associative writing, an overwrought, excessive aesthetic that explicitly fetishizes the woman's body as metaphor. HE is bulimic, a purging prophet. Privileged by VOICE — a voice that refuses to be medicated, disciplined, suppressed.

The fever dream passages of Bataille's *Blue of Noon*—the name of the anti-hero, Troppmann, a sort of joke — for he is not too much man, he is too feminine. He pathologizes all the female characters — Xenie, Dirty, Lazare — as out of their minds but he is the one who is a total fucking mess.

They worship Dionysus but play Apollo (the rational god) in real life. They channel the cunt yet are phobic of the cunt, of the woman's body, the real material life she lived, both in their texts as well as in the way they treated their muses.

For HE was the hysteric too. Eliot's visions, his fits, his sanitorium stays, it was *maladie à deux* his physical and nervous collapses, but she was put away, he collected the fragments. He who wrote in French to get over his block, his aphonia, like Anna O., yet when he spoke in foreign tongues he was understood. Flaubert also the hysteric with his "trances," "attacks," "fits" stuck within the bourgeois family, but he was considered the artist whom society favored, fancied, made allowances for. She was ruined. She went mad or was seen as mad and was put away.

The obsession with the female hysteric in the *fin de siècle* which carries over into modernism: Oscar Wilde's Salomé, Ibsen's Hedda Gabler, Baudelaire's hookers, Emma Bovary. The model of the process of the (male) modernist writer is that of CHANNELING, like with Yeats' Georgie-girl. The Great Men fetishized the hysteric, they

channeled hysteria, both in style (automatic writing), as well as in their writing of these female characters, yet in their material lives these men were not objects, but authors, subjects. I see this as a slumming. They fetishized the actress-hysteric, the spastic flapper-girl, the witty mystic, the lovely mental patient, they sucked her bone-dry.

An alchemy: burning down the raw material. A possession narrative, dictated by the male authority figure. He possessed, she possession. They can channel the feminine, her emotional and bodily excesses, they can channel voodoo-madness, but instead of being pathologized and disciplined they are feted as geniuses for their spirit-possession. Their automatic writing does not render them illegitimate.

These men mythologize themselves as being possessed by their uncontrollable spirits, these uncontrollable women. The bodily process of writing *Madame Bovary*—Flaubert bellowing about his girl. "At six o'clock this evening, as I was writing the word 'hysterics,' I was so swept away, was bellowing so loudly and feeling so deeply what my little Bovary was going through, that I was afraid of having hysterics myself," he writes Louise Colet. He channeled their tormented epistolary exchange into Emma's intensity in *Bovary*. Her work is her love; his is his novel. He is tortured by the novel and he conveys this "fretting," this "scratching" to her — she is tortured by him. "I had to lash myself till I bled, before my heroine could sigh with love." His nervousness, his terrors, his eruptions while working. And then, tears down his face, his exquisite joy.

These masters wrote the emotional, the hysterical, they were *also* overwrought, but then they punished and disciplined their muse's emotions in real life. Flaubert would advise Louise Colet to douse herself in chamomile and hot baths. She would write him so furiously. "My child, your infatuation is carrying you away. Calm, calm. You are putting yourself into a state — into a rage against yourself, against life. I told you I was more reasonable than you." Flaubert's love for Louise Colet was all things excessive, but he fed off of and transferred his emotions to his work, he backed away from the intensity and rupture and destruction of their mad love, and preserved himself as a writer. "If I were in Paris…how I would love you! I would sicken, die, stupefy myself, from loving you; I would become nothing but a kind of sensitive plant which only your kisses would bring to life." He (vampirically) drew from how Louise Colet acted as a woman in love — obsessive, petulant, demanding, etc. She was the adulterous woman as well. He drew from their affair (the cigar-holder with the inscription *Amor nel cor* she gave to him, like Emma gives her callous lover Rodolphe).

Flaubert equally callously broke it off with his mistress. He was able to distance himself, devote himself, become a mystic/monk for

the work, closing off from the demanding, desirous woman. She is merely the handmaiden for his possession. The high priestess of emotion. The Muse, as she was known. The goal for these men was to become a perfect artist. To transcend one's own suffering. The artist in the view of both Eliot and Flaubert needed to be impersonal, a god figure, although they both drew from real life. "Passion does not make verses; and the more personal you are, the weaker," Flaubert writes in a letter to Colet. In Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent": "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotions, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality." An escape from whose? Hers. Her personality is too strong. SHE is a "personality," not an author. Eliot and Flaubert's theories of writing that also played out in their personal philosophies of how to live one's life. Like an elaborate defense. Art is best if depersonalized.

These men, fetishizing and vampirizing the excessive (in their texts) while disciplining and punishing her in real life.

She is *raw material*. Too raw, too open, too needy, too emotional.

These writers and the cult surrounding them often represent the writer's possession as some sort of genderbending alchemy. That these literary geniuses have somehow been filled with Women, the madwoman or woman in love (a sort of madness) as conduit. Deleuze and Guattari, who worshipped the madwoman as metaphor, this ideal state of the "Body without Organs," their term the "becoming-woman" (they use as examplars of this the male modernists, Henry Miller, D.H. Lawrence, and the rest). "The first task of the revolutionary, they add, is to learn from the psychotic," from the introduction of D&G's *Anti-Oedipus*.

(Their policeman named Deleuze.)

Flaubert becoming the hysteric, this is the magic trick Baudelaire praises him for in his review of *Madame Bovary* ("To accomplish the *tour de force* in its entirety, it remained for the author only to divest himself [to the extent possible] of his sex, and become a woman.")

What does Flaubert's own proclamation—"Madame Bovary, *c'est moi*"—mean? A pretense at androgyny, channeling — he becomes woman, temporarily. This is the model of writing the novel from which women have been excluded. Fitzgerald saying he is "half feminine." The genderbending Tiresias in "The Waste Land." There is a desire to own, to vampirize, by assuming and colonizing one's fictional creations.

They represent their process as a pregnancy. That image of Henry Miller in *Tropic of Cancer*, carrying around underneath his shirt that bowling ball of a book, like a cancerous tumor, people give up their seats to him on the train because of the book he is carrying around

with him, that book he is about to birth so ecstatically. Nietzsche, who thought of writing as a "spiritual pregnancy." (Although writing elsewhere that the best cure for an intellectual woman with pretensions to write would be actual pregnancy.) Artaud's daughters of the cunt (although he would stop speaking to his women friends once they became pregnant).

I am now taking prenatal vitamins because of my thinning hair. Stress, maybe the veganism. When I buy them I feel everyone watching me — am I paranoid? — I feel the cashier at Whole Foods giving me a special look.

If Molly Bloom was a real woman writer, she would probably be dismissed as mad and unnecessarily pathologized. We glorify our male literary hysterics who often channel women and condemn our female literary hysterics. They can play women, fetishize her excesses. Make fun of her frivolity. They don't have to *be* women. A colonizing or appropriating of the feminine.

The model of the writer as one possessed. Nietzsche writing frenzied nineteen hours a day and practically blind. (He went mad too, his mad letters, bursting out into the street, throwing his arms around the flogged horse.) Flaubert furious at his desk. Kerouac type type typing. He had his wifey to feed him split pea soup and coffee and benzedrine.

If you are a woman — the flames are seen as too close. The flames of Virginia Woolf. One must not overstimulate. Charred. (They called Viv and her friends "Char-flappers.")

Virginia writing of her fatigue from penning the "mad parts," the Septimus Smith scenes in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Leonard was sure her "episodes" came from overwroughtness. Like how Flaubert was exhausted writing Emma's torment? Different somehow. He was never told to stay away from BRILLIANCE. He was never warned that it would make him ill. Even though he was also ill. Sometimes quite ill. Yet somehow treated differently. Never warned that to write another self as if it is your own is a form of self-destruction. (The police in different voices: mother, father, doctor, husband, one learns to swallow these voices, like knives.)

Virginia hearing the birds singing in Greek.

To become so possessed by a character you begin to play the part. A sort of Method Acting that is also a conjuring up. Jean Rhys POSSESSED by Bertha, who she first calls Antoinette Cosway. In the novel Rhys unravels what led to her being renamed, being destroyed, going mad, madness in her novel as the death of the self (by the patriarchal Mr. Rochester, her Lloyd's of London banker, all the English men with their terror of emotional scenes that terrorize Rhys' women). "I live with [Antoinette] all day and sometimes dream of her

at night! An obsession!"

Possession and obsession. She read *Jane Eyre* several times as a young girl when she first arrived from England. It haunted her. "That's only one side — the English side" she has said of the mad Creole heiress Charlotte Brontë paints in such a grotesque.

Later in life Jean Rhys also acting out the part, the crazy lady in Cornwall, getting into physical altercations with neighbors. Drunken scenes.

(Wherever we live I am convinced the neighbors know about me. I can see it in their eyes when we pass silently on the stairs.)

Compose yourself. Compose yourself. How were they composed? A HAG-iography — the biography of a female criminal not a saint. (Bertrand Russell who wrote to Lady Ottoline Morrell, his mistress and Bloomsbury hostess whom he later threw over for Viv, of Eliot's wife: "She is a person who lives on a knife edge, & will end as a criminal or saint — I don't know which yet. She has a perfect capacity for both." Of course he was being disingenous, as he was shagging her still lovely bones at the time.)

Virginia writing her demonology of Vivien(ne): "She was as wild as Ophelia — alas no Hamlet would love her, with her powdered spots…" In reading Viv's bio I'm struck by how Virginia in her journals served as Viv's contemporary biographer, along with the journals of Lady Ottoline Morrell, who was caricatured herself as a lovesick hysteric in D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*. Morrell and Woolf both intellectual women who suffered from and were diagnosed according to all of the gendered categories of mental illness of the time, and went through numerous treatments for their revolving physical maladies. Their diagnoses and doctors were some of the only things these women shared with one another, swapping them like recipes or diets, passing around a dis-ease.

The line from the infamous biography of Virginia by her nephew, Quentin Bell: "All that summer she was mad." A demonology. And yet Virginia's journaled account of her last meeting with both the Eliots together, has also helped write the myth of Viv:

But oh — Vivienne! Was there ever such a torture since life began! — to bear her on one's shoulders, biting, wriggling, raving, scratching, unwholesome, powdered, insane, yet sane to the point of insanity, reading his letters, thrusting herself on us, coming in wavering, trembling — Does your dog do that to frighten me? Have you visitors? Yes we have moved again. Tell me, Mrs. Woolf, why do we move so often? Is it accident?…

She powerfully, even magnificently, concludes: "This bag of ferrets is what Tom wears round his neck."

I think of Viv as the mad double Virginia both identifies with and wants to dissassociate herself from. The spectre of the shuddering, chattering woman haunting her. She is her Bertha Mason. In Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* they read the figure of the violent double in Victorian texts as an unconscious incarnation of the female author's own rage and alienation, her "desire to escape male houses and male texts."

Virginia's revulsion towards Vivien(ne) is apparent in her journals. She is obviously an object of fascination, if not obsession for her, for how many inches she devotes to her. At times Virginia shows empathy, depicting Tom as cruel in his monk-like objectivity. That famous scene of Tom irritably telling Viv to put brandy in her coffee while out to tea with the Woolfs, while Viv refuses. This is towards the end, when everything had completely imploded. "One does not like to take medicine before one's friends," said Virginia, kindly. And yet she participated gleefully and fully in Viv's eventual exclusion and ostracism from the Bloomsbury pack.

In his screenplay for the film *Tom and Viv*, based on his play, Michael Hastings must invent a friend for Vivien(ne), a nurse she takes tea with, one who doesn't prefer Tom, as all of her friends did.

All these women isolated from each other. There are exceptions, the friendship of Emily Holmes Coleman and Djuna Barnes, Emily both the confidante and de facto agent to Djuna for *Nightwood*, she is the one who got Tom to read it. The competitive yet intense intimacy between Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf. Virginia so relieved to speak of writing with another woman. To speak of solitude. The Dinner Party of modern literary women, if it was anything like Bloomsbury, would be pretty vicious. Most of the wives didn't speak to each other. No friendship between Zelda and Ernest's wife Hadley — they could have used it.

In those early months in Akron, I structured my solitude through John's voice coming at me through the phone — sometimes clipped and disengaged. But then one day I decided to start a blog I called *Frances Farmer Is My Sister*, where I began to communicate with other voices. A small community of mostly women, all writers, each to their own cages, in different corners of the world. In private email exchanges and in the public comments on our blogs, we began to speak of solitude, like Katherine and Virginia. To speak of writing. To confess and hear confessions of the pauses and gaps and scratches that were not writing, but still part of this cycle. I even began correspondences with a few where we spoke about our marriages and partnerships, breaking the silence with each other.

I began to realize the need for another kind of invisible community. Where mostly we suffer alone, in anonymity. This feeling

of being a ghost in the physical world that can come from being a wife, a writer, an adjunct. I wonder, despite the tyranny and chaos of her personal life, if Viv had had some sort of community then maybe she wouldn't have lost herself.

She talked to the greats, while I talked to the wives and mistresses.

I hear their voices, calling to me.

Rhoda in *The Waves* is Virginia's attempt to write a mad-woman. The alienated woman, distanced from her body. She experiences the torment of the alienated self, she is terrified, anxious, preferring absolute solitude. "But here I am nobody. I have no face. This great company, all dressed in brown serge, has robbed me of my identity. We are all callous, unfriended."

The male characters in *The Waves* are egos set forth into the midst — they all want to be authors. They create themselves and each other through language. Louis the Australian poet, partially based on T.S. Eliot. The women do not have these ambitions. (Susan wants to be a farmer's wife, Jinny a socialite, Rhoda a wallflower.) Virginia apparently considered making Rhoda a fiction writer, but decided against it. Perhaps again like with Septimus Smith a desire not to draw too close to the mirror. Even more naked.

But Rhoda would surely have been a failed fiction writer. More like a Vivien(ne).

Perhaps Vivien(ne) can be read as a Shakespeare's Sister of the modern era, the fictional sister of the great playwright whose fate Virginia is so concerned about in *A Room of One's Own*. Embodying the drama of the woman who wants to write, can't write, must write. Who ultimately has her pens taken away from her.

There are so few photographs of Viv. There is that photo of her in a dance costume playing croquet, the scarf around her head gypsy like, her little white heels. She seems almost lively. She is alive. That is the beginning. When she was a pretty, charming girl who hasn't come to consciousness, who wanted to drag some life into the weakened Tom, a challenge. The couple would go quickstepping, in the beginning. Flirting with the officers, like Zelda. The slim androgyne. Life a whirl of tea parties and balls and dinner parties. Like Jinny, all body.

How she must have amused Tom in those early days, trying to get him outside of himself. She saw herself as the coquettish heroine Daisy Miller. And like in the Henry James novella his snobby Boston relatives disapproved.

James' *Daisy Miller* is often praised as a psychological portrait of a young American girl. The stuffy, small-minded Winterbourne analyzes

her with surgical precision, trying to decipher her. But she is depicted as a chatty, flirty, cipher. A silly enigma. Like how Fitzgerald later wrote her namesake in *Gatsby*.

Later on, when she became a Rhoda, Vivien(ne) took on the name of Daisy Miller as a pseudonym. She who had become so accustomed to false identities. The movement of taking on the name of a woman in fiction. These women who perceived themselves as heroines in novels. She saw in James' portrait a mirror, the misunderstood girl ostracized into an early death.

The Bloomsbury Group saw Eliot's wife as an intellectual lightweight. Ottoline Morrell wrote in her journal that Viv was a "frivolous, silly little woman." The gifts of dancing lessons and silk drawers from Bertrand Russell (Bertie), who also subsidized holidays at the seaside. She wanted, like Zelda, to be a ballet dancer "in order not to become merely 'T.S. Eliot's wife.'" She didn't throw herself into it as ardently as Zelda, however. Girls of that time were expected to be "accomplished" (French, watercolors, piano) but not artists. (Girl? She was in her early 30s when she married Tom. Yet she was still girlish.)

It was in Paris that the silly girl began to actualize. To get off Simone de B's dubbed "easy path." Viv's brief yet aborted coming to writing which occurred in her first moment of solitude. In Paris. Tom had left her there while he went to visit a nerve specialist in Lausanne following a suicidal breakdown. This is where he began to write his epic text of psychic and historical disintegration.

Of course at first she was so terrified, "so *absolutely alone*." But then she fell madly in love with the city, she wandered around, she took notes. She began to record impressions in a black notebook (the first of which has been recorded as missing since 1990 from the Bodleian Library). Her first sketches are of isolation, of being a foreigner. "…little doubt that in 1921 Vivien, just as much as Tom, felt a compelling need to express her despair with her tormented marriage. To do so was a form of therapy."

(But does her writing transcend therapy? who is to judge? and who decides? Cannot a piece of writing also be a personal exorcism? Was not "The Waste Land" itself a form of personal exorcism?)

This is November 1921. I try to connect the dots. Were the Fitzgeralds there yet? No they would have just missed each other. Earlier in the year, Zelda two months pregnant, the Fitzgeralds set sail for Europe — by November she would have given birth to Scottie (named after her father, so enraptured by the Athena myth), and in isolation in the winter of Minnesota. But what would it have been like if they had met? Both of them adored ballet dancing. And fashion. They could have gone shopping together! I long for some sort of friendship to form. I feel that they needed each other. Vivien(ne) was

born in 1888 and would have been 12 years older than Zelda when she was in Paris, she would have been 33, my age. Zelda would have been 21. She would probably have regarded Viv as a wife/hag, like Vivien(ne) regarded Virginia, 6 years older.

Back home, back to the old repetition of breakdown, bed, begging. However, during this long convalescence Viv makes her own reading list. She begins to work in earnest on writing in her notebooks. She and Tom working like mad to put together their little magazine *The Criterion*. She types to dictation, they fill in the gaps with her own clever pieces. One sketch appears under his name. She publishes under a variety of pseudonyms with the initials F.M., Fanny Marlow, Feiron Morris, Felix Morrison, all with separate styles and personalities, like Fernando Pessoa and his heteronyms (she confides to a friend: "There will be no end to Fanny! But Feiron will never make any money. He does not spin. He is a nasty fellow").

All during the time she is allowed to write, she writes freely, is in fact encouraged to write (sketches, poems, reviews), she is not stopped, she does not stop herself.

Woolf's output might be characterized by its gaps and silences, but Vivien(ne)'s is marked by a period of intense activity, and then silence.

A thwarted Mary Carmichael with the potential to have been a Virginia's Sister. (Is this really a stretch? Tom in a letter confessing to Vivien[ne]'s various prose personas, saying of her writing that she expressed "a point of view which is original — and which is more than original — which is typical of a very modern mentality which has not yet been expressed in literature, and of which Vivienne is the most conscious representative." Of course, elsewhere he praised her mind as being "not at all a feminine one," which reveals only Eliot's bias, not any truth regarding her prose style, or even regarding his.)

Many of Vivien(ne)'s autobiographical prose pieces published in their little magazine offered satirical and sometimes savage portraits of the popular kids in the Bloomsbury set — much like D.H. Lawrence and the writing of others. Gossip the common fuel among that circle. Sibylla as the bored yet alienated female Prufrockian narrator who listens in and cattily, wittily exhumes. In these pieces Viv displays an eye for satire and a musical ear, resembling Katherine Mansfield, ironic because Katherine was considered the Eliots' enemy (her husband, John Middleton Murray, ran a rival little magazine). Viv's biographer Carole Seymour-Jones calls these "revenge pieces," some even pointed at her husband, an "act of self-immolation."

Her social caricatures published under "Fanny Marlow" wildly offended their social circles. Viv as the Gossip Girl of Bloomsbury. Ultimately Tom owned up to the identity of the pseudonymous poison

pen, and promised never to publish her again. One wonders why he allowed these pieces to go to press in the first place? Perhaps this is what he intended all along, her biographer theorizes. After the controversy, the autumn *Criterion* didn't appear, then it was relaunched as *New Criterion* a year later, with Viv cut off as collaborator. Outed, ostracized.

After she was barred from publishing in *The Criterion*, Viv sent one of her more personal, bodily stories "The Paralysed Woman" out to *The Dial*, and it was rejected. Not a surprise: a woman writing so nakedly about social isolation and sickness. Strange, too — her husband publishes her scornful descriptions of him but wouldn't publish her most confessional (i.e. feminine? photographic?).

This rejection absolutely crushed her. Although she continued to write in secret, in her journals, this was the end of her writing career, and the beginning of a complete and total breakdown.

The crisis of 1925. Shingles. Suicidal. Starving herself. Now an artist of hunger. Her trances due to fasting. "Am nearly hypnotic, always was. Could be first class MEDIUM," she confided to Pound in a letter.

She is fast fasting away, she is threatening to disappear. During these years she metamorphosized into the myth of the Cumaean Sibyl, grotesque, haggish. "Vivienne slipped into nonbeing the longer she lived with Eliot."

The photographs, towards the end. It is as if Vivien(ne) is shrinking. A caption announces in her biography: "Her writing career in ruins, Vivienne's distress showed itself in anorexia and drug dependence." In another, Virginia and Tom stand, healthy, robust, or at least he is, towering over her, seemingly ignoring her. The ghost-like Vivie at the corner of the frame, dwarfed in her white hat and dress, slipping, slipping away. She is so different in every image, can't capture her quite. Elusive somehow. Out of focus. Already a ghost. The date: 1932. She would be committed six years later.

An Anna Kavan figure, one of her blonde victim-characters in her later works, panicked, histrionic. Anna Kavan, who emerged from narcosis ice-blonde and spectre-thin, a Hitchcock heroine, a lady Lazarus who began to write the fractured psyche, who began to write in a more fragmented, modernist style. Drug dependence linking the two. Also: invisbility, ostracism. Yet Anna Kavan did not have a more famous husband. She regarded herself as a writer. She wrote through her breakdowns.

Anna Kavan taking on the name of her heroine.

Anna Kavan taking heroin.

Anna Kavan, who portrayed madness as a loss of self. "There are always two deaths, the real one and the one people know about," Jean

Rhys has her heroine Antoinette say to her lover Rochester in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

The Sibyl who begs: Let me die.

After her breakdown, Tom placed his wife in a sanitorium, sent euphemistically "to the country." It would become a rhythm of confinement. He would jaunt to the French Riv and hang out with all the sexy Ballets Russes dancers. While in the asylum she scribbled out an SOS to Ezra Pound, signing herself "Little Nell" in letters (another character, Dickens' doomed girl-heroine, always seeing herself as a fiction). Of course he did nothing to help. None of the Eliots' friends were really her friends. They all betrayed her. She was the minor character.

Upon return, she found her old flat cuckooed by Tom's brother and wife. Tom began plotting his escape, renting a *pied-à-terre* in Soho. He sent her to Brighton with a nurse. Then he sent her to exile, to outer suburbia.

At the beginning of their separation she began, briefly, to enjoy her freedoms. To paint her mouth red and go out dancing in nightclubs. "To dance was to forget, to annihilate, meaning," she wrote in one of her Sibylla stories. Her rapid-fire flapperness in her notebooks. "To be bored was perhaps the only fear that Sibylla ever really knew."

A different Vivien(ne) begins to emerge here, dangerous, madcap, a bobbed trainwreck — I think it is this Viv I would like to have known. At dinner parties she begrudgingly participated in to keep up some bourgeois illusion of a "we," she would jokingly threaten people with knives. At some point she briefly decided to leave Tom (for another man?). He "hushed" up the scandal by committing Viv to a sanitorium in Malmaison outside Paris — the very same one Zelda was committed to during her first breakdown. Eventually a few days later he brought home a "shamefaced and penitent Vivien." His conversion to Anglicanism made divorce impossible. He planned instead for his stint teaching at Harvard; he was to go without her.

A biographer writes that she went into "*grande hysterie*" as Tom's departure grew near. Perhaps she didn't suddenly want something so irrevocable, public. She perennially threatened suicide. She would erupt in tears. She was capable of screaming with her body, of putting on such a bravura performance of protest. Saying things like: I am useless and better dead. Or: I ought never to have married you.

And he never returned to her. And with that, the final gesture of exclusion. The madwoman stricken from the public sphere. No longer the poet's wife. The Bloomsbury women acted as agents, smuggling him in. He was secretive about his address. They gossiped about it, gleefully. Did you hear? Did you hear? They knew he would never see

her again.

He has abandoned her. She becomes banned.

(God, the *experience* of reading her life. So abject and gooshy. It makes me cringe. I experience an absolute intimacy coupled with a desire to protect myself by distancing. Like a toxic girlfirend. I lose a sense of equilibrium reading these books — I get too inside.)

When he returned to England and he never appeared, if the mythology is to be believed, she became terrified he was a "victim of a conspiracy." She began to think his "enemies" were the reasons he deserted her. Even though his last letter to her was "a very cold and brutal document." She was so blind when it came to him.

He would communicate with her solely through solicitors. She refused to accept the separation — and still sent out Christmas cards signed by Mr. and Mrs. T.S. Eliot. For who was she anymore if she was no longer the wife of the Famous Poet? These women's whole lives bound to that identity.

Before the separation, she taped a newspaper cutting of Constance Wilde, Oscar's bride-beard, into her scrapbook. Perhaps this is how she saw herself.

"One of her last acts was to buy some sheet music at Selfridges: 'Can't Help Loving that Man of Mine,' from *Showboat*."

She convinced herself in their separation that Eliot was prevented from seeing her. Some sort of plot to keep him from her. She would wait outside houses, record car numbers, spy on men in gray suits she thought could be Tom. She left the front door open for a half hour every evening. At his publishing company screwing up her handkerchief as she wept, Eliot's secretaries entrusted with calming her down while he hid in the bathroom.

She put up the good fight. An advert she tried to place in *The Times* once he had left her, address unknown:

"Will T.S. Eliot please return to his home, 68 Clarence Gate Gardens, which he abandoned Sept. 17th, 1932."

She frequented his plays, an apparition that refused to be forgotten, a vengeful Fury like that which haunts the hero in Eliot's play *The Family Reunion*, the cast-off wife (literally, cast off the boat). She went to see his play *Murder in the Cathedral* nine times. She wanted to be the wife, the celebrity. At the back of one theatre she allegedly carried a sign that said: "I am the wife he abandoned." I love the theatricality of this. Like the Code Pink protester being carried away during Senate hearings, yelling: "I have a voice!" A puncture in decorum. How horrified he must have been. Then she toyed with blackmail, writing letters to solicitors wondering about his proximity to certain young men. Tom said in 1954: "I was afraid of the dreadfully untrue things she said of me and afraid that my friends

believed her."

She said his "callous cruelty" made her "act in a queer and abnormal way."

She only once got through the screen of resistance (fortified by the Bloomsbury clique and his secretaries at Faber), at one of his public lectures. In 1935 she was carrying their terrier under her arm and wearing her black-shirts costume of the British Union of Fascists (the uniform a big marketing tool for women, it was actually quite fetching, in its sleek beret and white skirt, black shirt and tie, with high heels). She asked him when he was coming home. "How do you do, I cannot talk now," he replied.

We are told by Eliot biographers that her diaries of the 1930s are full of memories, "perhaps distorted, and to be read with caution." The ones that can be found, anyway. Allegedly she only kept a diary for one year of her early married life (1919). Yet: later in her life, ostracized and alone, she is still fervently writing in her notebooks.

Should we believe Vivien(ne)? That men pushed through her door, pushed her down, stole books, papers?

In her flat now she felt "*incessantly molested* and my nervous system shaken and ruined." This is when she tried to assume a double identity. She mirrored herself with this character, Daisy Miller. Daisy who is also thought to be vulgar and common, who is ostracized by the elitist expat society, just like she was, Daisy who meets an early death. She became a character in fiction. How literary this all is. She began to communicate about herself in the third person in letters. "You know how terribly nervous and timid she is, and how she is apt to lose her wits and go all to pieces."

She became, now, a fugitive of her life. She is certain she is being followed. Paranoid on the streets, convinced she was going to be kidnapped or murdered. Paranoia probably a feature of the bromism as well. Although she was under surveillance by Eliot's man-servant, a rather ominous fellow who censored and interrupted her mail.

She performed night watches in the street, her protection: her uniform and terrier Polly. "I am always driven out, to tramp the streets — this way and that until I get such a horror of the streets that the streets only understand." A wonderful line from her journals, which reminds me of Anna Kavan's *Asylum Piece* (published in 1940). It is 1936. The year Scott Fitzgerald cracked up, but his wife was already put away. The year of publication of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, which Eliot edited. Robin Vote wandering lost and zombie-like through city streets. The first year of the war. Viv lived from hotel to hotel, like Jean Rhys, like Rhys' character Sasha Jensen in *Good Morning, Midnight* (published in 1939).

A four-year struggle over family money. Her "reckless spending."

Tom a trustee of the Haigh-Wood estate. He still carried her checkbook in his briefcase. She is paid an allowance, tries to see her father's will, which led to her finally being committed, after earlier unsuccessful plots by her brother and the family. She was certified and confined in an asylum in 1938. For Viv the Involuntary Reception Order, in force prior to the Mental Health Act of 1959, did not provide for rights of appeal, individuals could be confined at the sole request of relatives.

Towards the end, she is the creeping woman like at the end of "The Yellow Wallpaper." She has lost her self. On the street Vivien(ne) bumps into former acquaintances: "No, no, you don't know me. You have mistaken me *again* for that *terrible* woman who is so like me."

My femme fatales, my deadly women, so often left to die.

Once she was finally certified *The Family Reunion* could be performed.

It's difficult not to read Vivien(ne) as this pathetic spectacle of illness and dependence. The ultimate grotesque of femininity, like Freud's hysteric/housewife (both Dora and her mother). But channeling her, imagining an interior life, I can sense her early inner spirit and see it squelched and doomed into sickness and submission. Under different circumstances and with more strength and less of a mother who crafted her as an invalid from childhood, she could have been an author. Maybe. Or maybe if she had not married Eliot it would never have occurred to her. Or perhaps without the suffering (of illness, of the isolation of her marriage) she never would have come into consciousness to write. She who was always kept in the shadows. She did not write on the whole *despite* it all, or: she did not write enough, or: she did not publish enough to be seen and saved as a writer. (The New Zealand novelist Janet Frame spent eight years in a mental institution under the mistaken diagnosis of schizophrenia, was subject to over 200 electroshock treatments. In 1952 she was finally saved from a lobotomy and released when an official at the hospital read that her poetry collection had won a prize.)

Vivien(ne) is depicted so often as the femme fatale, the black widow, the vampire.

Yet Tom seems bolder, more vital, more alive as she declines. Jaunty in top hat and cane outside of Faber & Gwyer.

Yet he was the one who dressed up as Dr. Crippen, the famous wife-murderer, for a fancy-dress party. The first time Vivien(ne) went along with the gag, playing his secretary/mistress Ethel le Neve, disguised as the cabin boy for their transatlantic escape. Six months after Vivien(ne) was committed, never to appear again, he donned the disguise again for another costume party.

He played the part of the martyr to perfection. Strange, is Tom

wearing green face powder? All of Bloomsbury sided with him. “You see, sir, one must make allowances for artists.” Genius always excuses ill behavior. And she? She with the clever words? She who lacked discipline? She who preferred life to writing? He the object of pity — she of scorn.

Viv was ardent that the Bodleian Library at Oxford get her notebooks and papers, so that she would be remembered, so that her version would be read. Around her neck she wore the key to the safe at Selfridges where they were deposited. A diary entry of August 1934: “You who in later years will read these very words of mine and will be able to trace a true history of this epoch, by my Diaries and Papers.”

I would love to read her unpublished texts, described briefly in her biography, although the Bodleian informs me I would have to get permisson from Valerie Eliot, Eliot’s second wife, to photocopy them. After Michael Hastings’ play Valerie asserted copyright over Vivien(ne)’s papers. The Eliot estate as litigious as Tom Cruise’s (some would argue for the same reasons).

SUPPRESS EVERYTHING SUPPRESSIBLE

Suppressed even after death — she cannot be read easily.

I receive this in my inbox:

Thank you for your email. I’m afraid that in the absence of a Vivien(ne) Eliot expert the citations you give aren’t sufficient for us to be able to quickly identify the material you are interested in. However, before we start tracking down these items, perhaps you can let the Library know that you have obtained the permission of the copyright owner of the MSS, to whom all requests for quotation and copying for publication purposes (rather than private study) must be obtained. This is:

The Estate of T.S. Eliot
Faber & Faber Ltd.
Bloomsbury House
74–77 Great Russell Street
London WC 1B 3DA

I find this note remarkable for so many reasons. Even the very phrase “the absence of a Vivien(ne) Eliot expert.” Or: “private study” outside of some larger discourse (she is still held captive, outside). So much of modernism is myth-making — who gets to be remembered? Whose writing is preserved and whose is not?

The implicit threat is made here. Where does fair use begin and end? In this context, this almost becomes a matter of zombie civil rights: who speaks up for the voice of the dead, and who is allowed to suppress it? Who is the keeper of this charge? The answer to this is here: “‘permission…for quotation and copying for publication

purposes…must be obtained' from 'The Estate of T.S. Eliot,'" keeper of the primary material even after death.

There appears to be a project to destroy these remnants, these reminders. To destroy these women. And I have married a keeper of archives.

I feel compelled to act as the literary executor of the dead and erased. I'm responsible for guarding their legacy.

In 1947 Viv died at 58. The cause of death on her death certificate was "heart attack." Perhaps by medical negligence or overdose. The wrong date was carved on her tombstone. The next year her husband won the Nobel Prize. (And Bertrand Russell then two years later — has anyone, before or since, bedded two Nobel Prizes in literature?)

An erasure. The line "To My Wife" dropped from his poem "Ash Wednesday." Bertrand Russell wrote her out of his memoirs.

All mentions of the first Mrs. Eliot eradicated from history. Or this is the project, it seems.

Tom's childhood sweetheart Emily Hale thought that Tom would marry her after his first wife died. After her hopes were shattered, she too had a breakdown and was institutionalized. He ordered that her letters to him be burned. His letters to her are sealed up at Princeton.

Most people threw away their letters from Viv but kept the ones from Tom. When her brother Maurice delivered papers to the Bodleian there was much missing. The diaries delivered were only from 1914, 1919, and the later period when she was already separated from her husband, ending in 1936. "The many other sources for Vivienne's life remain buried within the collections of more famous figures."

Jane Bowles' fragments trapped in a notebook begging to be freed. Later after the stroke a mind trapped inside of itself. Such cruel fate. For a writer to lose her words. Or for one's words to be lost. Vivien(ne)'s notebooks mouldering in the basement of the Bodleian. Many went up in a garage fire. Others ominously went missing. We do not have entrance to the last three years of Sylvia Plath's journaled life. One of these bound journals "disappeared." Ted burned the second "maroon-backed ledger," containing entries up to three days before her suicide. For the children. We are told 1919 was the only year Vivien(ne) kept a diary during her married life. Is that true? What stopped her from writing during those other years? SUPPRESS EVERYTHING SUPPRESSIBLE. Their words are suppressed. Scott forbade the publishing of Zelda's journals.

What to make of this disappearance or willful destruction of these archives of these wives? A disappearance could just (potentially) show neglect. Destruction, however, reveals the danger these femme fatales posed. Of course I could just be like paranoid Vivien(ne), feeling she

was being watched and followed (but she was, the men who came and broke down the door).

Did she write while inside? Did Zelda? Their asylum pieces? It is impossible to know. Most likely they were not given pens or pencils (thought of as weapons, weapons to prove one's own reason). Yet even though their writing instruments were taken from these women (along with their humanity, their dignity, their agency), somehow some still wrote. A desperate need to communicate to the outside world.

19th century French asylum inmate Hersilie Rouy, the musician held at Charenton who would scribble desperate cries to authorities, her letters intercepted, destroyed. She wrote in soot and blood, on any surface, in an attempt to prove her sanity. Fellow inmates gave her scraps of paper attached to a thread which they strung under the door. (Sibylla, whose scraps would scatter to the wind if unread.)

Agnes Richter, a former seamstress in an asylum in Austria around the same time, would spend her waking hours embroidering onto her hospital uniform texts so dense as to be unreadable.

The writing of the inmate is not to be believed.

An archaelogy of silence, as Foucault writes.

Sibyls trapped within silent caves, the movie screens, speaking only the fragments of subtitles (and in their real-life cases, trapped in home asylums and forgotten, Marie Prevost whittling away, Crisis-a-day Clara institutionalized at The Institute of Living in Hartford, Connecticut; Louise Brooks in her upstate New York hermitage, an author at last). Perhaps the flappers were the new hysterics. They too were silenced, dubbed. The flapper is certainly portrayed as "actressy" like a hysteric. ("She ought to be in cinema, like your Norma Talmadge," says a character of Nicole Diver in *Tender is the Night*.) Zelda and Lucia with their Madame Egorova, Vivien(ne) dancing to the phonograph, Louise Brooks and Joan Crawford dancing the Black Bottom and the Charleston frenetically on tables, Clara Bow flap-flapping around the screen, their "eloquent thighs" as Peggy Phelan writes of the dance of Freud's hysterics, their domestic seizures mimicking the contortions of Charcot's models. Our dancing daughters — the name of one of Crawford's early silent flapper films, when she was a long-limbed beauty, before the mask — it certainly has a Freudian ring to it.

Schizophrenia, which both Zelda and Lucia were diagnosed with, was originally a catch-all category like hysteria. Later aspects of the diagnosis were channeled into other classifications with future permutations of the DSM. (A woman who would have been diagnosed as schizophrenia in the 20s-50s would in the 80s be much more likely to be diagnosed as bipolar or borderline personality disorder, because

of new subclassifications in the DSM-III.)

Elaine Showalter makes a link in *The Female Malady* between the diagnosis of schizophrenia and the idea of a woman dividing herself in two by being both the *surveyor* and the *surveyed*, quoting from John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*: "A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself." Berger goes on to use the example that at her father's funeral the woman sees herself, weeping.

Compare this to Zelda's eulogy of the flapper in *McCall's*—the art of the flapper is "the art of being… being young, being lovely, being an object."

So many actresses in the old Hollywood star system became mental patients, constructed by the gaze, by the studio's publicity department (Clara Bow, Gene Tierney, Frances Farmer, Marilyn Monroe, Vivien Leigh, these are the ones diagnosed, so many more are popularly retroactively diagnosed). Frances Farmer and Gene Tierney as love interests of Tyrone Powers in the film *Son of Fury*. Both of them promising Hollywood golden girls, the perfect glassy portraits cracked under the pressures of the star system like the one painted of Gene Tierney in *Laura*, both institutionalized, given electroshock. Gene Tierney reformed, even went to work as a shopgirl in Topeka, Kansas, Louise Brooks, allowing her to be an outpatient at the Menninger Clinic. Frances Farmer became for a time an outlaw, a daughter of fury.

I looked in the mirror the other day and realized — I am beginning to style myself like a modernist. Hopefully more Mina Loy than Jane Heap. I already wear the weird costumes and cloche hats and spitcurls. One of the Midwestern women that went to Paris, and lived the life of jeweled glamour and cafe bohemianism. Except I am still here.

Mina Loy with her slim elegant sheath and matching cloche hat and darling pumps, dangling chandelier earrings (sometimes ready-mades, like thermometers). Katherine Mansfield's colored stockings, her brightly colored silk costumes. That picture of the Baroness on the beach with Djuna Barnes while they were still young, their elegant pointed shoes, the Baroness is subtly dressed, for her, Djuna always posed like a fashion model, always elegantly turned out, her dark shiny hair in the chignon, the red lipstick, the jaunty hat. These women like silent film stars for me.

I love pasty skin like yours, says the woman at the Sephora in Pittsburgh, where I drive for two hours each way once a week to teach a writing workshop. I have gone to get very glittery dark green eye-shadow to contour around my lids. (The green nails of Christopher

Isherwood's Sally Bowles, his 19-year-old chorus girl in *Berlin Stories*.)

The flapper is a glittering object who offers herself up to the world and offers up her equally glittering *bon mots* to being jotted down and immemorialized. Zelda's cinematic counterpart is Tallulah Bankhead, who grew up with her in Montgomery, Alabama. In *Gatsby*, Daisy possesses the flirtatious irreverent wit as befitting the flapper: "We'll meet you on some corner. I'll be the man smoking two cigarettes," she jokes to the crushed-out Nick. Her language has a jazz-like syntax, a repetitive rhythm. "I'll hope she'll be a fool — that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool." Again an actual exclamation, by Zelda, although jotted down and reshaped by Scott, he posed with pen at the bedside of the birth of Scottie. Her real words were: "Oh, God, goofo, I'm drunk. Mark Twain. Isn't she smart — she has the hiccups. I hope it's beautiful and a fool — a beautiful little fool."

He takes on the feminine voice, shapes the poetry of Zelda's diary and dialogues. "Why she tore up the pavements with sly remarks… She didn't actually write them down, Scott did, but she said them."

She gives up her character, her conversation, freely to be documented, mythologized — as she (at first) wants to be famous.

The quick and lively banter of the flapper, offset with dramatic silences (her quicksilver MOODS). The staccato rhythms of Christopher Isherwood's heroine Sally Bowles. Sally Bowles reminds me of girls who are witty and brilliant and stylish characters but not yet authors — like art-school chicks. They prefer living as opposed to writing, or living while highly conscious of the gaze. Today Sally Bowles would totally audition for *America's Next Top Model* and be cast as the alterna-crazy.

The Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven who wrote: "I am keenly conscious of my ownself as if I were a theatre and spectator in one — only not the author."

These actresses are okay at first with being his raw material. Nadja asks Breton to write a novel about her, June Miller wanted Anaïs to write one about her. Delighted in fact, until it feels like a violation, to always be *drawn from*. (June upon asking Henry for a divorce: "Now you have the last chapter for your fucking book.")

While the girls are called vamps, there is something vampiric about him. He wants to possess her somehow, to make her his possession. "When I admire women, I want to own them, to dominate them, to have them admire me," Fitzgerald once wrote.

Fitzgerald, later, in the Hollywood days, going up to girls at parties, pad of paper in hand, copying down their lines, asking for their stories.

He who drew upon his wife Zelda as his "collaborating muse"—to

borrow a phrase from Robert Lowell's "The Dolphin," using many of her spoken utterances and diary entries for the voices of the flapper characters in his novels, all except *The Last Tycoon* (which he wrote in Hollywood, having a new mistress as muse, Zelda was by then out of the picture, no longer his actress). She played the parts so he could immortalize her.

He draws almost verbatim from her diaries and letters — turning down an offer to publish her journals. They were his material, he insisted. She was all raw and intense emotion. "I am not going to write you anymore. I am too unstable."

In a mock-serious review of *The Beautiful and the Damned*, Zelda writes:

It seems to me that on one page I recognized a portion of an old diary of mine which mysteriously disappeared shortly after my marriage, and also scraps of letters which, though considerably edited, sound to me vaguely familiar. In fact, Mr. Fitzgerald — I believe that is how he spells his name — seems to believe that plagiarism begins at home.

Yet of course the flapper or Surrealist *femme-enfant* is not a writer. She might write love letters or keep a journal (whatever happened to Zelda's teen-dream diary?) but she is not a serious writer or taken seriously, even when she eventually longs for this. Even if she could write her own life better than he could.

The Fitzgerald flapper is tale-teller, not author. Like a medieval mystic needing a male confessor (his Princeton hero Amory reading St. Teresa of Avila in *This Side of Paradise*). The masculine modernist process of creation (author/muse), mirrors not only the mystic-confessor relationship but also the doctor-patient relationship in the Freudian talking cure (in all three binaries, she is the raw material, who needs to be shaped and coaxed into a narrative, she spurts forth, she needs to be contained).

A haunting refrain: Mr. Fitzgerald is a novelist, Mrs. Fitzgerald is a novelty.

To be so compelled to save a heroine in a book that it makes you want to throw a book across the room. I feel this for: Breton's *Nadja*, Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*.

The modernist work where the model of the case study is most apparent is *Tender is the Night*, which can be read on one level as a rewriting of Zelda Fitzgerald's experiences in a Swiss sanitorium (the "raw material"—and Zelda wrote a novel, *Save Me the Waltz*, of her experiences, albeit a censored one). But beyond this idea of Fitzgerald using Zelda's text as raw material, like Freud did with Schreber's autobiography, the novel itself takes on the model of the case study: the main character is a Freudian-styled analyst, Dick Diver, who has

married his patient-wife, Nicole. (Hard to ignore the phallic imagery in the name Fitzgerald chooses for his hero: Dick is pen/penis, he is author, authority, dictator. "Diver" suggests a desired trip to the female unconscious, calling to mind Carl Jung's statement about his analysand Lucia Joyce and her father: "They were like two people going to the bottom of a river, one falling and the other diving.")

In *Tender* Fitzgerald gives the reader only rare entrances into Nicole Diver's interiority — her letters, or snatches of her dialogue, or the glorious monologue running for several pages in Book Two:

… Tommy says I am silent. Since I was well the first time I talked a lot to Dick late at night, both of us sitting up in bed and lighting cigarettes, then diving down afterward out of the blue dawn and into the pillows to keep the light from our eyes…Talk is men. When I talk I say to myself that I am probably Dick.

When he writes (or rewrites) a fragmented feminine voice it is most like the writing that Zelda performs herself in *Save Me the Waltz*: A case of possession, or perhaps, as is the case of Zelda's mysteriously missing journals, a form of vampirism, of theft. Perhaps this is another meaning for Cixous' *La Genet*, named after the thief — texts that are outlaw, criminal, stolen.

Nicole's occasional speech in *Tender is the Night* has a convulsive beauty to it, an absurd cocktail banter:

"*Nat*urally I wanted to see what was inside a waiter. Wouldn't you like to know what was inside a waiter?"

"Old menus," suggested Nicole with a short laugh. "Pieces of broken china and tips and pencil stubs."

A throwaway, a toss-off, reminiscent of one of Zelda's letters to Scott. ("Do you still smell of pencils and sometimes of tweed?")

Yet in Fitzgerald's novel, as in real-life cases of these modern wives and mistresses, the woman's "disordered language" is also used to convict her, to diagnose and name her—"Diagnostic: *Schizophrenie*." The "case" is not an author, and so the letters, inspired by Zelda's letters, are viewed not only as diagnostic examples but also the raw material for the book about the patient-wife that Dick is trying to write (the case study of a psychoanalyst, standing in for a novelist, although still with the resulting writer's block which mirrors the one in real life, Fitzgerald taking nine years to finish *Tender* while Zelda wrote her version of their marriage and their life on the French Rivera in months, it unfurling from her).

In *Tender* Dick dissects his wife with his gleaming surgical language, committing them to the Realm of the Emotional and Irrational. When Nicole approaches him about a letter she received describing a seduction of a(nother) patient, he uses her diagnosis as a madwoman to dismiss her (even though we learn in the same

paragraph that a kiss had taken place). She confronts him with the evidence (the written language) which he uses as proof to convict her.

"This is absurd. This is a letter from a mental patient."

"I was a mental patient."

He stood up and spoke more authoritatively. "Suppose we don't have any more nonsense, Nicole. Go and round up the children and we'll start."

At first Nicole throws one of her "scenes," but then a power shift happens and she refuses to speak, couching herself in silence (she is the rebellious Dora, fighting with mute body).

This afternoon he would have been glad had she rattled on in staccato for a while and given him glimpses of her thoughts. The situation was always most threatening when she backed up into herself and closed the doors behind her.

This passage seems to suggest that perhaps it is the silence of the femme fatale that is most deadly. These mad women, these abstracted women are dangerous when they don't speak, and their tales must be pulled from them, colonized, repeated and rewritten.

In *This Sex which is Not One* Luce Irigaray asks: "Does Woman *have* an unconscious or *is* she the unconscious?"

She who represents a primitive myth, something of the unrepressed past. Blank, you can project anything onto her.

The threat of the femme fatale lingering through modernist texts. All the dark ladies of "The Waste Land," wounding the impotent Fisher King. She is an excessive, castrating presence, threatening to sweep the subject up into sudden hysteria. Fitzgerald's baby vamps and society vampires, the fast girl who kisses (the real danger is her mouth, Zelda's mouth was selected in her high school composite of prettiest girl). Mythologizing the lives (wives) that catalyzed them. A DeKooning horror: FEMME. He who immortalized her in leatherbound.

In her journals, Anaïs Nin portrays June Miller, Henry's wife and their shared muse, as a destructive, unearthly figure who possesses both of them. They were so enthralled with Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*. Bertrand Russell thought Vivien(ne) had a "Dostoevsky-like cruelty."

June as Anaïs first saw her, in her red velvet dress with the holes in the sleeves and the stain down the front, a cape and man's fedora, her face powdered white, her eyes lined heavily with kohl, her lipstick black or green, her blonde peakedness. June Miller a "figure of doom" like the femme fatale Robin Vote in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, another object of obsessive love, she is the character in everyone else's novels (perhaps that's why she wanders, she wanders to escape this fate). A

cipher sleepwalking through the night, through love affairs, pulled by others' desires for her. Robin Vote who was partially modeled on Djuna Barnes's longtime and unfaithful lover Thelma Wood. Yet also Robin Vote is also Djuna's friend, Elsa, (Robin also called the Baroness), who nicknamed herself *La Somnambule*. She with her revolutionary costumes made out of street detritus and stolen department store items. Like some sort of mythical warrior with her trench helmet and Joan of Arc hair.

In his *Arcades Project* Walter Benjamin seizes on Poe's story "The Man of the Crowd" for his chapter on *flânerie*. In the story the narrator follows a *flâneur* down the streets of London and (as a voyeur) observes the man's erotic compulsion towards the crowd, this ecstasy of being lost in the crowd. Yet the *flâneur* by his essence is male — the woman in the city is still viewed as both commodity and consumer.

What is the *flâneuse* escaping? She is escaping her role as the object of desire. She wants instead to gaze, to desire. Lol Stein walking around the town in a state of amnesic consciousness, she goes shopping as well, the work about the erotics of witness as opposed to being witnessed. She leaves her body, the scene of the crime. Lying in the field of rye, voyeuring Tatiana and Jacques Hold in the hotel room.

And so what is Robin Vote escaping from? She is escaping being a character.

Gail Scott writing the *flâneuse* in *My Paris*, haunted and resurrected and newly gendered from modernism, the character is reading *The Arcades Project*, she watches across the street, the erotic tableaus of the mannequins in the shop window, yet she is also watched, or internally watches herself, she is always worried about what she is wearing, whether she looks French enough. To be a woman, perhaps, is always to be a foreigner.

She is seen as the living embodiment of a philosophy, but not a philosopher herself. (*Flapper and Philosophers*, Fitzgerald's first story collection.) And yet: Zelda was a brilliant philosopher of herself as archetype, in her articles on the flapper she was commissioned to write for women's magazines: "I refer to the right to experiment with herself as a transient, poignant figure who will be dead tomorrow." She lives and he writes it down. She acts, she throws scenes (how literary), she *externalizes* (while also remaining so curiously blank and passive). A muse for a violent style of living. In his texts she is defined by her recklessness, her brave cruelty, her brazen Nietzscheanism, devouring and destroying everything in her path. To Bataille his mistress Colette Peignot was the embodiment of the Sovereign, his Sadean libertine. He described her as "one of the most vehement existences ever lived." (She writes a poem, "Archangel or whore / I

don't mind / All the roles / are lent to me.") After her death he posthumously renames her Laure, publishing her secret writings.

As I picture her, I realize Colette Peignot is almost a doppelgänger for June Miller. The femme fatale is self-destructive; the femme fatale is also murdered.

In *Blue of Noon* Bataille drew upon Colette for the character Dirty, the desire object (as well as the lovetorn Xenie, he breaks her up into fragments). "She is the abject character in sumptuous dresses and drunken stupors," he writes. He depicts Dirty as a libertine, a Courtney Love figure: the work opens with her drunken spectacle — a scene of grande abjection and convulsive beauty. She pisses herself, is dolled up again in her exquisite clothes. She is foul-mouthed, *folle*, she asks the maid to masturbate. At the end he dresses her as an Aryan goddess, in her bright-red swastika of a gown, he portrays her not him as the fascist, dictatorial; it is her will that overpowers.

(A recent Style story in the *Times*, on Courtney Love, looking like a Hans Bellmer doll, the one with the blonde frazzled wig and blue bow. She enters her hotel room to meet the reporter completely naked, on the arm of the painter Anselm Kiefer, and she tugs on a sheer lace dress that still shows everything, cunt and nipples and all. This is a very Bellmer image actually, and Kiefer bends down the supplicant position to try to stuff her into a pair of black Givenchy heels, while she insists that the reporter also helps her.)

She who makes all these scenes in hotels (this is how Nadja was put away, how the writer Leonora Carrington was put away).

They are always throwing things — parties, selves, fits. (Scott threw himself at the feet of Martha Graham, Zelda threw herself off a staircase in retaliation.)

When he met her she was a golden girl written up in the newspapers, Judge Sayre's baby girl, a belle of Montgomery society. A gorgeous spectacle, like when she rode through the center of town in a one-piece flesh-colored bathing suit.

The stunts they pulled together then. (He with the American name, Francis Scott; they were an American pastime, starcrazy, starstruck.) Riding on the tops of taxis. All the wild gin-soaked parties. Driving to Alabama in their white knickerbocker suits. Scott collecting guests' watches and jewelry and burning them in tomato soup. In Hollywood, gatecrashing the Goldwyn party barking on all fours. She would take baths at other people's parties. Often she would play hostess from the bathtub.

He loved her eccentric behavior — indulged it, cultivated it. Until he decided her behavior was self-destructive, or was destroying him, when so much of their behavior was mutually and singularly self-destructive — burning her clothes in the bathtub, throwing her

diamond watch out the window, all over Lois Moran. In literature when these women act out it is first seen as an embodiment of a philosophy (sometimes monstrous and possessed), but later, once he grows bored with her, as is the case with Breton and Nadja, the violence he originally fetishized is now interpreted as the ordinary bizarre behavior of a madwoman he had confused for a muse.

I am sitting near the front desk at a salon in a town called Hudson. John and I make the 30 minute drive here for yoga. It is a town centered around an expensive boarding school. The town is empty because of spring break. In the town, shopping is limited to the Chico's, GAP, and an accessories store.

The "women's issues" section in the local bookstore contains books about dieting, what not to wear, and how to deal with your mastectomy.

I am at the salon to get my long neglected eyebrows waxed. Since joining the yoga studio I have felt very ungroomed. Amidst the blonde women with their disciplined muscular and marital bodies. (Next to them I am swarthy, collapsed in pools of sweat.)

There are magazines set out on the little table while I wait but I have brought Dodie Bellamy's *The Letters of Mina Harker*. I underline a line before I am called: "The monstrous and the formless have as much right as anybody else."

The woman who is waxing my eyebrows tells me she's from the more blue-collar Canton. She has a scar on her eyebrow where a piercing used to be. She has green eyeshadow that matches her tight-fitting shamrock top. Her hands are freezing cold as she touches me. She apologizes chirpily. Her hands smell faintly of smoke.

She asks what I do for a living. I stumble out that I write, "but it's not like my book's at a Barnes & Noble," I say. "I don't make any money at it." She gives me a small, pitying smile.

As with everyone she is curious how I've come to this town. John and I are obviously strangers, in northeastern Ohio, the two of us citified, wearing all black, but most noticeably here, everyone white, blonde, *nice*.

Everyone is just so friendly around here, she is saying. It's true they are friendly, I agree. Although their faces are not all open, of course.

It's just so pleasant she says as she lines a strip under my eyebrows (incidentally, she fucks up my eyebrows, rendering them two scare quotes, also ripping a patch in my left inner brow. I say nothing, it is my fault, for going to a salon here, and then she charges me an unbelievable amount).

Yes it is, I say. It is very pleasant.

Something about this town is making me become a good citizen again. I must rebel. I must rally against the hygienic.

When I mention how expensive everyone's yoga wear is, how rumpled I feel, John says, Fuck them. He clomping around after class in his German boots.

I try to imagine the Baroness strutting down the streets here. Impossible! Although she too wandered around the Midwest, coming after her husband, the novelist Felix Greve, the German translator of Oscar Wilde who staged his suicide with her help in order to evade his debts, afterwards changing his name to Frederick Grove. From Ellis Island to Pittsburgh, then for a time on a farm in Kentucky, then a tent, then once he abandoned her she was even an artist's model in Cincinnati, wandering up through the East Coast, Philadelphia, Connecticut. During this time marrying, briefly, the German baron, who enlisted in the army and never returned.

This period adrift mirroring her twenties uprooted in Europe, Berlin, Rome, Munich, Dachau, taking up with different lovers — a career, from the French for *carrière*, that which takes you from place to place. For these girls, career was a matter of falling madly in love, or being carried away through the force of someone else's desire, being allowed to travel in exchange for their bodies and a bit of their self, their soul — the Baroness modeling for the stained-glass artist, the playwright who wrote a play about her, the husband-novelist who wrote books about her. This is what allowed them temporary access into artistic circles and allowed them EXPERIENCE. (Better than other careers for bright intellectual girls at that time, such as being an invalid.)

A young Jean Rhys traveling with her first husband John Lenglet, the Dutch journalist. She remembers those early days in *Good Morning, Midnight*, so dreadfully poor in Holland, rainy, cold, tulips on the table. In Vienna less poor, she can buy dresses, then Paris, where she was pregnant. She taught English with a round belly, all while her husband got work of an indeterminate and vague nature. Her husband arrested for selling foreign currency illegally (like Elsa's husband, all these confidence men, the music of charm they are selling). The Paris jobs she remembers in *Good Morning, Midnight*, salesgirl in dress shop, artist's model, mannequin.

In New York City, Elsa resurrected herself as a living sculpture. She was also an artist's model for Duchamp and others. She who used to pose in pornish *tableaux vivants* as a libertine 20-year-old. Her costumes which resulted in her arrest. When she "paraded the streets wearing only a Moroccan blanket." The shaved head sometimes shellacked in red, the yellow face powder, stamps for blush. Her bolero jackets gilded with carrots and beets, body adorned with

tomato cans, her elaborate head-dresses. The wooden birdcage around her neck with live canaries inside.

If she was a performance artist in Hudson, Ohio, she would go to the local grocery store here, like she did at the Manhattan Woolworths and steal things for jewelry — teaspoons for earrings, an electric battery for a bustle. She who flashed at the French Consulate in Berlin, while in the 1920s, broke, desolate, dying to get out. She later lived in a shelter, then a psychiatric asylum, where she wrote her memoirs.

These *vivants* who later became authors, these girls who later became unsightly spectacles, brilliant and angry hags. If the alluring young woman in modernism is the femme fatale, the older or ugly woman who won't shut the fuck up is also represented as deadly, a scary contagion, something syphilitic.

She would surely get arrested almost immediately here, I realize. Towns like this are like Disney World, they clean out the vermin, the shit, like it's never even there. They close themselves off to the outside, the outsiders.

Most unhygienic, I think, would be her female aggressiveness, her rage. She madly pursued these Great Men. William Carlos Williams who called her insane, she fought him in poetry, a warfare. How she'd bellow after Marcel DuChamp, who was horrified of her: MARCEL MARCEL I LOVE YOU LIKE HELL MARCEL! Marcel Duchamp had a revulsion boner for the Baroness like André Breton was a bit horrified by the younger Claude Cahun, who would also shave her head and use her body as her own performance in her *Autoportraits*, sometimes playing the dandy, other times androgynous alien. (Allegedly Cahun was in love with him, but I like to think of this as a performance too.) Like Bataille's revulsion-boner for Simone Weil, depicted as a radical harbinger of doom in badly cut black clothes in the character Lazare in his *Blue of Noon*. Women who nakedly threw off the mask of femininity, who were depicted as grotesques in these texts. The Baroness who subverted being the muse, the art-object, through her aggressive, devouring sexuality. Her ecstatic violent poems, the aggressive thrust of her letters, her capital-lettered scream. (She was not the silent or chattering pretty Surrealist *femme-enfant*.)

In her never-finished biography of the Baroness, Djuna Barnes called her "a citizen of terror, a contemporary without a country." Writing or living as terrorism: Claude Cahun's and Marcel Moore's insurrectionist pamphlets they slipped into the pockets of Nazi soldiers. (Both the Baroness and Claude Cahun only let in provisionally to the Dadaist and Surrealist movements, respectively, these women seen more as living embodiments than practitioners. Outsider artists.)

Jane Heap the editrix of *The Little Review*, the journal that

serialized *Ulysses*, publishing the Baroness' poetry in the same issue, defended her art as an "art of madness." She wrote to angry readers: "Madness is her chosen state of consciousness. It is this consciousness she works to produce art." A difference of privilege, the male modernists who could cultivate this aesthetic of madness, and still be viewed as sane, and these women, who were criminalized.

The Baroness was kind of like a Lady Gaga of her day, although she would be seen now just as insane. Like a bag lady. Especially here. Her extreme poverty later on in Germany, where she sold newspapers. Like Sasha Jensen in Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* or the elderly woman of the streets in Violette Leduc's *The Little Lady and the Fox Fur*. In Berlin, she launched a desperate epistolary campaign to Djuna and others. Like Vivien(ne)'s SOS's to Ezra Pound. These elliptical, raw, emotional, final fragments, begging to be saved.

It's all context, I suppose. Or perhaps Lady Gaga gets away with it because she is young.

During yoga class I measure my white hairy legs against the women on either side of me. It is very un-yoga to think about ungroomed bodies. This studio is very un-yoga. It's "power yoga"—which is mostly aerobic. The blonde perky bodies wrapped in their Lululemon yogawear, the teacher with her microphoned headpieces extorting us to think about tightening up for bikini season.

Something I have noticed here is that every woman has black nail polish. It's as uniform as the diamond ring encircling the ring finger of every woman of a certain age at the studio. I find myself wanting this black nail polish, a pedicure. I know that Chanel introduced the nail polish shade Vamp a long time ago, and the color has now probably trickled down to small town manicurists in the Midwest.

Once a hag, no longer a muse, no longer useful for vampirism. One grows bored with her so easily. Like Breton growing tired of Nadja and not even visiting her once she is put away.

When the madwoman loses her charms, she is laughed at, vilified, Vivien(ne), Bertha, Frances. Charcot's Saturday parade of working-class women at *La Salpêtrière*.

At the Akron Art Museum, I am standing in front of two sculptures by the Fluxist artist Yayoi Kusama, two armchairs covered in Kusama's trademark phallic shapes. Kusama was once intimates with the Surrealist assemblage artist Joseph Cornell, who lived with his mother in upstate New York. Both artists of absolute obsessiveness, Cornell trapping images of his actresses and ballet dancers into his boxes. Kusama with her penises and polka dots. I used to have a poster on my wall of Kusama naked like a nubile porn star on a couch, surrounded by dots from her MOMA show. Now she lives in a mental

hospital in Japan. Two women wearing shorts are giggling at the silver penises. She's a very great artist, I intone, impatient. Are you friends with her? they ask. I pause. Yes, yes I am. In a way. Yes, I say.

"We like nothing so much as youthful hysterics," André Breton and Louis Aragon write in their manifesto praising the "invention of hysteria," and its 50th anniversary, glorifying the practice of med students fucking the female mental patients. Charcot would stage his pretty nubile hysterics in a series of posed seizures in his photographs, sometimes through hypnotic suggestion. (They were so suggestive.) Augustine was the best at striking these poses of *attitudes passionelles*— mockery, anger, eroticism, ecstasy, surprise. These women became celebrities, the first supermodels, reality stars.

So many brilliant girls in Surrealism who catalyzed books and artworks — they were the empty lovely receptacles he could fill with his own spirit. They are clairvoyantes, with their lovely receptive skin, they who can intuit and make quippy his brave thought.

In *Nadja*, Breton recounts his temporary street-muse describing an image perfectly from a philosophical treatise he has been reading. (She doesn't need to read, that would spoil her, although she craves books, she asks for books.) She who embodies his theories. Breton who writes of Nadja in a footnote: "Does this not approach the extreme limit of the surrealist aspiration, its *furthest determinant*?" She is so PURE (this is what Bataille writes again and again about Colette Peignot, what does this mean? That she somehow lives his untainted philosophy?).

In the collection of writings of the woman he now calls Laure — which Bataille himself edits — he meditates on and mythologizes this sort of channeling with Colette Peignot. He claims they never spoke about intellectual matters, although they lived together and belonged to various political groups together, including *Acéphale*, a secret society centering around theories of eroticism and sacrifice. Even though she published texts in journals (sometimes under the pseudonym Claude Araxe), he says he did not know she wrote, or wrote so seriously, that she had accumulated so much material. But when she is on her deathbed dying of consumption, in absolute agony, she tells him to look in her purse and in her papers, to find the small white folder that bore the name "The Sacred." Part of the fragmented philosophy on the scrap: "The poetic work is sacred in that it is the creation of a topical event, 'communication' experienced as *nakedness*." This is the moment of clairvoyance for Bataille, that he will later mythologize, as he had just been writing, he says later, the same identical sentence. (They share the same mind, or he shares hers, that is how HE the modernist genius views his muse, Fitzgerald who wanted Zelda to be a "complementary intelligence.")

Despite her expressed ambivalence about being published, Bataille publishes this text "The Sacred" in an underground edition in 1939. This reminds me of Simone Weil giving Gustave Thibbon her notebooks: "Now they belong to you." The fragments being handed over, the ambivalence about publishing. Simone Weil depicted as the virginal activist in *Blue of Noon*, another sort of criminal, yet radically opposed to Dirty (although Colette Peignot and Simone Weil in reality were friends). Michel Leiris and Bataille themselves curate and archive Colette Peignot's writing, with their extensive footnotes, a way to legitimize perhaps. In the City Lights *Laure: The Collected Writings* there is almost as much of Bataille's writing as there is of hers, like his brief biography of her (which ends as soon as they begin to live together, as soon as he uses her as a character in his fictions, so another biography plays out in the novels, yet we are supposed to ignore that). Yet she is still seen as more mystic, a debauched Simone Weil figure, than as an author. Her fragments serving as raw material for Bataille's more complex theories which he later works out, in his memoirs and theories (while not mentioning her).

The women supply their spiritual autiobiographies, for others to use (often in letters, for letters are read as illegitimate, they do not grant her an author's rights). Her writing her character to be better understood. Scott with Zelda's journals, Bataille with Colette P's fragments. The Baroness wrote letters to her imprisoned novelist-husband, tales of herself as a young libertine, fodder to fictionalize, mirroring the other, more famous Colette writing the schoolgirl *Claudine* novels for Willy (he had already written the *bildungsroman Fanny Essler*, about Colette's adolescence). Later, in letters, the Baroness narrated her memoir for Djuna Barnes to use for her planned biography that was never finished (instead, she was turned into a character). Louise Colet supplying Flaubert detailed letters about what she was like as a young girl, providing the basis for Emma Bovary's brief period of mysticism at the convent. The Baroness writing her own story of her childhood while isolated in Kentucky (never published).

Colette Peignot writing her early childhood, a text that Bataille and Leiris name ("Story of a Little Girl: Sad Privilege or a Fairy Tale Life"). It reads like a confession or case study — the death of a father, a young girl's trauma, the pedophilic priest, like a surreal fairytale, like Unica Zürn's *Dark Spring* or Anna Kavan's *Sleep Has Its House*. Bataille situates "Story of a Young Girl" and "The Sacred" as testimony that "bears witness to a lived experience," examples of "communication" felt as "nakedness." Yet there is an illuminating footnote (Bataille's?) at some point during Colette's memoir piece, which we are told is unfinished. We are told that "[starting here, the

typewritten copy, which served as the basis for the text, no longer has the same finished character as what proceeds].” The aesthetic of the “unfinished,” which is that of the notebook, of the diary, of fragments (not the novel, which is supposed to be cultivated, worked over, finished). What follows is actually a spirited political rant — which I actually prefer to what precedes, which feels more staged, more sensational.

Reading *Laure: The Collected Writings* I am struck how these modernist men, with their finished, worked-over texts didn’t really *know* these women they write of so ecstatically. The *Acéphale* society, with its alleged Dionysian rituals in the forest — Bataille and Colette P., both craving to be the first human sacrifices. The symbol was a headless man. These women, although they are portrayed as cruel, sadistic, were often masochists in their relationships, they were the ones who lost their heads, by their mad love, the sparks of their relationship catalyzing his writing and often destroying her. Colette Peignot’s letters show an emotional bind, and absolute devastation at Bataille’s infidelities. She was the sacrificial victim on whom he meditated. Colette Peignot becomes the elliptical ghost of Bataille’s *Guilty*, his emotional, agonizing document of intense grief and personal crisis, a meditation on the extremity and excesses of mystic as well as erotic experience. She is obviously everywhere, ghosting the text, these meditations began at the year-anniversary of her death. Yet in the original manuscript he scratches out her name, and in the final version she is omitted, a sacrifice for transcendence.

In this mythical alchemy of Art she is forgotten. A heroine sacrificed on the plot of literature.

On a trip home to Chicago I go to the library of the Art Institute, my special collections partner in tow, to look at the Hans Bellmer books housed in the Mary Reynolds Collection, as I want to get closer to Unica Zürn, whose gorgeous novel/screen memory *Dark Spring* I just read. They didn’t have any of her materials, unsurprisingly. Mary Reynolds was DuChamp’s mistress, an ingenious bookbinder who also became close to the Baroness and helped her out at a time when almost everyone else had ostracized her (by then Duchamp had dumped Mary to marry an heiress). I always experience a sort of chilly, paternalistic air when in these rare books reading rooms, like they are worried your heat could somehow damage the immortal material. The tweedy rare books librarian doesn’t want me to touch the more fragile books. He voices his skepticism about how much of the vision behind these extraordinarily bound books are Reynolds’, he suggests that they are mostly Duchamp’s design, which he just told Reynolds what to do. Of course he thinks that. I mean, of course he

thinks that. But it's also a case of peddling — the items acquire more value being the brainchild of a great man, as opposed to his mistress.

I write notes in my notebook because I assume I'm supposed to.

I write: I am not a scholar.

I write also: I do not know French or German.

I also write down for some reason what I am wearing:

soft grey jacket with the high collar that is almost backless

black cloche hat

soft stretchy black pants (semi-harem) tucked into black boots

old old dark gray Hussein Chalayan cardigan, which has permanent pit stains

All my beautiful pieces I keep like in a museum, because I don't want them ruined somehow by the stink or casualness of my body.

I leaf through old issues of *Minotaure*. The only female presence the gorgeous photos of Lee Miller and other Surrealist models, and Bellmer's mechanical dolls.

I am realizing these muses of modernism were often objectified twice over, through literature and often through psychiatry (both reducing them to their BODY).

"She is the doll," Hans Bellmer said when meeting Unica Zürn, marveling at her resemblance to his poupees. Later his photo of her naked bound torso on the cover of a Surrealist journal with the caption: Keep in a Cool Place. The meaning is clear: She is a piece of meat.

During the time I begin reading the biographies of the mad wives, stewing in my obsessions, feeling eerily like I was performing their lives, I write a letter to *Poetry* magazine about a review of Djuna Barnes's posthumous poetry collection. Although I had previously written theater and book reviews, I think of this letter as one of my first acts of "criticism," which for me always originates in *feeling*, in an angry protectiveness, especially towards my beloved women. The review begins by using Gertrude Stein's condescending compliment of Barnes, the description of her lovely ankles, and continues to characterize Barnes as an It girl of the Left Bank, not Barnes the girl and genius, but a mere, pretty socialite flitting around the more serious Modernist writers. The reviewer also theorized that Eliot must have exposed her to John Donne and the rest of the metaphysical poets that he saw as inspiring her poetry. These are all small, slight dismissals, but the snarky details chosen add up to a dismissal of the work by focusing on Djuna Barnes's looks, how others saw her, refusing to regard her as anything more than a dilettante, a novelty. This review was not the feting or canonizing of a genius, but the petting of a girl lucky to be on the periphery.

They published my heated letter valorizing *Nightwood* as one of the most important masterpieces of modernism, and taking issue with the reviewer's characterization of her as a minor, flashy, accessory to some more significant scene, noting that Samuel Beckett regularly sent her money in her days of poverty later on in the Village because he was like others admiring of her genius, and that James Joyce let him call her "Jim" because he regarded her as a peer, not because she was some cute thing. *Poetry* then allowed the reviewer a rebuttal, something along the lines of: "I still conclude that Djuna Barnes is a minor writer."

Ephemeral, denied the canon. Objectified by her slim ankles. I participate in my first Internet feud when the online literary blog *HTMLGIANT* publishes a satirical post about Zelda, written by the pithy punchline bully Jimmy Chen, whose schtick usually involves posting images with inane captions in an attempt to merge high-brow with hipster irony, a lit version of the Do's and Don'ts in *Vice* magazine, the subtext often a disgust with the female body (such as his post pointing out the pronounced nipples of a female literature professor at an Ivy League). The photo is the one used on the back of Milford's biography of the lovely numbed-out Zelda posed on a crate with her ballet slippers. Chen, operating out of the most caricatured outline of the Fitzgerald myth, rhapsodizes about Zelda's cute folds of back fat in the photo and quips that he hopes the sheets were comfortable in the asylum (I wish I could quote it: it's been taken down since, along with many of his offending posts). The snarky dismissal. I answer back with vitriol. It becomes heated, ugly. Personal. Slurs of a sexual nature slung in the comments section, mostly by a chauvinistic supporter of Chen's. A way to bully, which is to humiliate, to silence, to make a woman smaller whose behavior is seen as outsized. (Won't she fucking shut up?)

This is one of the first times I exhibit rage online, in the comments sections and in my blog, in those early months. I feel so protective of these women. I summon forth all my fury. Fellow bloggers, Angela Simione and Roz Ito, comment extensively, comforting me, rallying behind me, helping to contextualize my anger. (Our blogs serve as legitimizing networks for anger. The rant can be revenge, to get something off our chest about our place in the world. To break the silence, the silencing.)

Simone de Beauvoir who writes that the woman is always reduced to the body, regardless of how she situates herself. The photo of her. The one taken in Chicago. *Après la bain*. She grew hot after fucking Algren. Pinning her hair, she is standing in front of the mirror naked, except for high heels.

She has quite a rear on her, everyone said when the French

magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur* reposted the photos for what would be her 100th birthday. A delight in objectifying the ample rump of one of the greatest minds of the 20th century. As if to say: You are still the second sex. You will still disrobe and discard your intellect at the bedside table.

(She is so often dismissed, made the punchline, the darling punching bag, later the baglady joke. They keep her Outside.)

Henry Miller's CUNT PORTRAITS. The woman is reduced to the cunt, to the body, through which he can achieve his own mystical revelations. The whore acts as a conduit. In the last ecstatic rushes at the end of *Tropic of Cancer*, jerking off deliriously on literature while looking down "into this fucked-out cunt of a whore," he falls into a volcano (her body the ruins he meditates on). Flaubert's metaphors of fucking for writing. He gets off on himself—"The erections of thought are like those of the body; they do not come at will!" In *Guilty*, Bataille is drunk, grieving, mad. He surrounds himself with prostitutes, like a Surrealist Charlie Sheen, nameless goddesses who he can fuck to find some sort of release, a temporary death, reaching a mystical ecstasy that is an exit of the self. "My true church is a whorehouse," he writes. Dirty a desirous corpse in *Blue of Noon*. Troppmann jerking off to his mother's corpse. "I realized, in any case, that my attraction to prostitutes was like my attraction to corpses." They lay there and play dead.

(Yes, yes — the exquisite corpse is female.)

During a weekend in New York, I buy another gray coat, this one a long wool winter coat with an upturned collar that I think makes me look mysterious. John and I become so consumed like the Fitzgeralds — we become at times extraordinarily possessed by *thingness*, the texture and fabric of these things. And everything and everyone is always so beautiful in New York, and there's all the art to go see, and it's almost staged, this beauty, or conformist, this beauty. Like the Anselm Kiefer show at the Gagosian, all these immense poetic landscapes encased in ornate cells.

On the plane home I read Lydia Davis' new translation of *Madame Bovary*. Flaubert's exquisite attention to clothes. In New York all the women click-click on the cobblestones in their delicately heeled ankle boots.

I have just interviewed with the head of the creative writing department at Pratt, where I have been offered a couple of boutique (yet low-paying) classes in the fall. John is trying to round up work so we can finally move here. Although he has also just been offered a rare books position at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "It is an extraordinary opportunity." I went with him to visit — it is

green, calm, boring.

And yet in New York I feel unsettled by it all. Voluptuously sickened by all of this intense and fervent consumption. The existential female nausea Sylvia Plath depicts in *The Bell Jar*. The first half of the novel is set in the Manhattan glossy magazine world, and Esther becomes infected by the desire for a patent-leather purse that matches her belt like Doreen has, and the clothes that she buys with her scholarship money at Bloomingdale's, and she loses track of her identity, what she wants (to write). And conformist Hilda like an empty *dybbuk* in her hats, droning on and on about the Rosenbergs and all the colors of green. And how Esther rebels from the indoctrination of the fashion magazine, throwing her clothes like confetti off the rooftop, letting the streaks of blood dry on her cheeks, a grotesque mimicking of the ritual of makeup, as she rides back to the dreary suburbs.

The desire, sometimes, to throw everything away.

I wonder if Flaubert's characterization of Emma B. is mostly surface, the feminine excess — her extravagances for clothes that turned into her fatal debt, the silk rose parasol, her delicate shoes.

Zelda who made paper dolls. She herself was written as a paper doll — transparent, easily destroyed, one-dimensional.

She is the doll: he dresses her.

I wonder if the male genius identifying with the female heroine is really a form of masquerade, like Marcel DuChamp in drag as his alter-ego Rrose Sélavy. An exaggerated performance of feminine stereotypes as opposed to really trying to enter and understand a character.

These modernists can descend into stereotypes when writing women, the eternal feminine — Lawrence, Fitzgerald, Flaubert, Henry James. They write her as Simone de Beauvoir's Young Girl who acts out these stereotypes, but without any gasps, any stirrings of something different. Emma's melancholy after her mother dies is depicted as self-conscious, as if to attain some image (John Berger's girl at a funeral). Flaubert does not give her boredom or disillusionment any real existential weight. He gets at some truths of her childhood (the raw material supplied by Louise Colet) — but then afterwards does she have any real humanity? What is authentic behind her frivolities? What well of loneliness inspired her to turn to romance novels? What intensity of emotion made her voluptuous towards God? Towards her lovers?

In the last chapter of *Room* Woolf calls for the perfect writer to be androgynous, quoting Coleridge on the subject, who writes that an androgynous mind is one that "transmits emotion without impediment" yet doesn't necessarily have "any special sympathy with

women." But I think of how fervently, in letters to Louise Colet as well as in his novel, Flaubert dismissed women and their minds. He writes to LC (how did she handle these dismissive letters?) that the only writer who understood women, "these charming animals" was Shakespeare. "He portrays them as overenthusiastic beings, never as reasonable ones." He might have identified with Madame Bovary, or had been her, but he also thought of her as a frivolous thing, with a feminine (weak) mind, all flesh instead of spirit. There is no ambivalence to her characterization, there is no consciousness, or possibility of consciousness. She is in Kant's minority, a silly, frivolous animal. Her emotions are never sincere, unlike even Charles's misguided uxoriousness (yet Emma's husband also just romanticizes her as the character in his own novel, he never really sees her).

Perhaps Flaubert's identification—"*C'est moi*"—is really about ownership. He did draw on his own life for Madame Bovary, his stealing furtively into Paris for his rendezvous with Louise Colet, trapped at home in the country house, yearning to escape. But he also said "*C'est moi* " to make even more complete the idea of the NOVELIST as manufacturer, of something spun out into air, to deny any real-life examples (there were several), or to deny in some way these other narratives. He contributed the mythology himself — that over years he went through the grueling process of tattooing his soul with his bad-girl Emma. This process, this model of the writer as god, as Creator, obliterates whomever came before. They who commit surgery on themselves, pretend also to a sort of surgical knowledge of all women, like the doctor with his patient, the priest and the same tortured housewife of another era. In a letter to Louise Colet, Flaubert amazingly tells her he KNOWS a woman's sufferings, including her own, because he is author of them.

You speak of women's sufferings: I am in the midst of them. You will see that I have had to descend deeply into the well of feelings. If my book is good, it will gently caress many a feminine wound: more than one woman will smile as she recognizes herself with it. Oh, I'll be well acquainted with what they go through, poor unsung souls! And with the secret sadness that oozes from them, like the moss on the walls of their provinicial backyards…

I remember D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* as one of the first novels I really felt ecstastic about. I saw myself in Lawrence's sisters, Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen. But reading the work again recently I am struck by how the characterization of the female characters often exists on the level of fashion — Gudrun's emerald-green stockings, modeled on his wife Frieda and Katherine Mansfield. The yellow velvet get-up of Hermione, modeled on Ottoline Morrell, who Lawrence portrays as a frantic erotomaniac. He sets these stylish

Bloomsbury women in mine country, rendering them ridiculous.

Flaubert does this too in his exquisite concentration on clothes — sneering at the bourgeois and their wedding clothes, Emma's gown trailing in the dirt. He makes fun of Emma's desire for finger bowls, reducing Emma to her frivolities. And yet, she was a stylish woman stuck in the boring country. I feel a tremendous empathy for her.

Fitzgerald's writing of the flapper-character (who is always a character) is also mostly surface, style. Nicole Diver in *Tender* is as excessive and frenetic a shopper as Emma (and this is given as some sign of instability). Her shopping is as inventive and associative as her speech. One (incomplete) list: "She bought colored beads, folding beach cushions, artificial flowers, honey, a guest bed, bags, scarfs, love birds, miniatures for a doll's house and three yards of some new cloth the color of prawns."

Fitzgerald's heroines are defined by their enigmatic character. The riddle of the Sphinx-like woman. In his novels I crave a more dimensional character who doesn't exist only through the male narrator's gaze. The truth is that Fitzgerald never wrote complex female characters — they lacked interiority. (Although Nicole, with the interior monologues she's granted at the end, is probably his most fleshed-out female character, but most of the time she's given associative sense-impressions but not any real consciousness.) Even though the flapper, by her essence, is enigmatic, there is not much attempt to really get at the truth of a complex and contradictory self hidden somewhere underneath.

I love that Kate Moss has her engagement ring modeled on Zelda's — it's too perfect — the archetypal cipher of our time echoing and fetishizing the ideal cipher of the modern era.

Gloria in *The Beautiful and Damned*, especially, is written without reflection or empathy. It's like Fitzgerald wrote his wife and took out all of her charm and brilliance. Except for the very tangential mental patient who is a painter in *Tender*, none of his female characters are artists (by contrast, Lawrence does make the character based on Katherine Mansfield an artist in *Women in Love*, unlike Flaubert with Bovary, or Djuna Barnes with Robin Vote, a character that is a composite of two women who were artists, the Baroness and Thelma Wood).

They depict her like Jinny in *The Waves*—the socialite all body and babble, not Rhoda, alienated wannabe writer, when maybe she is BOTH.

And yet D.H. Lawrence was rapturously read by so many female writers of the modernist period — Anaïs Nin wrote a study on him, praising him for his androgyny. I wonder if this is because they weren't aware of or were dismissive of other women-penned

precursors or peers. Virginia Woolf doesn't even bring in contemporaries when crafting a female literary tradition in *Room*. It's remarkable how some women writers go out of their way to prevent comparison. Probably the most generous writer of this period towards other women writers was Nin, who was snubbed in her attempts to connect with both Djuna Barnes and Anna Kavan, about whom she wrote rapturously in her text *The Novel of the Future*. But did these women really feel Lawrence wrote the closest mirror of who they were, in all their intricacies, beaming back at them?

He writes a book in an attempt to understand her (but really, this is an attempt to unravel himself, she is merely the shadow who haunts). He wants to crack into her interiority, her impenetrability.

(It is never really about *her*, these tales of courtly love.)

In *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* Marguerite Duras is critiquing, I think, these modern novels starring the alluring cipher — her fuguer Lol Stein is watched over obsessively by the narrator, Jacques Hold. Yet she is also voyeur, lying deliriously in the field of rye, watching Jacques get it on with her former best friend, Tatiana. She wants to escape this oppression of being the one watched, made into an object of curiosity. I love that anecdote about Lacan telling Duras in a basement bar that Lol V. Stein is a "clinically perfect delirium" and Duras dismissing this later, in an interview: "When Lacan says, 'She knows, the woman knows…' Those are a man's words, a master's words… The reference is himself…"

The symbol for the *Acéphale* society — Off with her head! This is the defining cry of these "major" modernist texts. Off with her head! The king dictates to his Alices. Her interiority taken off (from Henry James's Daisy Miller to Fitzgerald's Daisy).

As much as I love his *Berlin Stories*, Christopher Isherwood's portrait of Sally Bowles is kind of a drag: she is a stylized vamp, with her painted green fingernails, her stained fingers, her powdered white face, her cherry lips. That darling costume, the black silk cape and little jaunty cap. Of course this is how this girl-as-character acted in real life, all flapperish, femme-fatale-fuck-me, a "character," a "personality." But Isherwood paints her too cruelly, a gold-digging grotesque whose mask is pulled away only temporarily when she has to have an abortion. "It seems to me that Sally, without the abortion sequence, would just be a silly little capricious bitch," he commented, later. Yet what a cliché to have a female character show depth because of some forgotten maternal instinct, some convenient sentimentality — the Sally Bowles I have known, the cool art school girls, are not so simply read.

In *The Berlin Stories*, Sally Bowles asks the narrator, also called Christopher Isherwood, to ghostwrite an article about the English Girl

for her. Tellingly, he doesn't capture her. "'It's not snappy enough,' she says."

Sally Bowles was actually based on Isherwood's Berlin friend Jean Ross, a newspaper correspondent who covered the Spanish Civil War, whose similarity to Sally is mostly surface: the saucy attitude, the sexual conquests. (The last name is apparently taken from his other friend Paul Bowles, although I like to think it's from Jane, whose persona was all theatrical insouciance and refreshing eccentricity.) This isn't the only case of a female character's politics being stripped away in modernist texts. In *Blue of Noon*, Dirty is depicted as an apolitical libertine, even though Colette Peignot was, like Jean Ross, and like her friend Simone Weil, politically active in the fight against fascism. (Colette is fragmented into two characters, she is also the lovetorn Xenie, who is an activist, albeit a weak-stomached one.) And in their mythologizing of her Michel Leiris and Georges Bataille tend to downplay Colette Peignot's politics, in favor of her performance of the self.

On the Internet (home of illuminating biographical fallacies), I read several times that Sally Bowles is based not on Jean Ross, but on Jean Rhys. Hard to see the Edwardian fragile girl being Sally Bowles (the mistake is perhaps the result of both the author and Isherwood's character once having been English chorus girls). Sally Bowles is really like one of Jean Rhys' saucy friends with bobbed hair with her in the chorus that she writes to in *Voyage in the Dark*. Like Maudie, the older, brazen friend. Maudie who asks at the beginning about the "dirty book" the 18-year-old heroine Anna is reading. Maudie says, adroitly to her: "I bet you a man writing a book about a tart tells a lot of lies one way or another."

In Rhys's novels, we get the interiority of the chorus girl. She writes the books about tarts that do not lie, giving voice to the girl who is always a character in a novel. Her between-the-war novels detail a feminine economy of the city streets, where women use and are used, where the sugardaddy is necessary for survival. They who are both preyed and prayed upon. These street muses are often seen as a sort of prostitute to the male narrator, and sometimes they worked as prostitutes. Or how they lived, how they got by, seen as a sort of prostitution. Holly Golightly hooked, too, yes she did. Their bodies could be rented. June Mansfield who worked as a taxi dancer in Times Square, rented out by the dance like a cab. (Henry Miller heard her discuss Strindberg, he bought a stream of tickets.) Wikipedia tells me that the Baroness "practiced prostitution"—although the reality was more complex: Elsa ran away from her middle-class family at 18, from her abusive father, looking for a lover, like Sally Bowles, to keep her "instyle," Maudie encouraging Anna with her new male protector to

get a nice flat and a fur coat, Elsa like Jean Rhys worked as an actress, chorus girl and artist's model in Berlin and Munich. In a demimonde of the girl that Jean Rhys writes so well, these muses of modernism were conscious of their role in the exchange, conscious that they had to perform in order to be protected. Vagabonds and demimondes. They could be read as either con artists, or survivalists. A form of prostitution — sure, yes. That's what Henry Miller means when he calls her WHORE (yet Henry Miller is no less of a whore as he documents himself in *Tropic of Cancer*, always begging and borrowing to get by, posing for erotic photos, considering a rich woman as protector, the difference again, who gets to name).

I find so many missing girls among Surrealism, my milk carton heroines, like Nadja. Or the mysterious Suzanne who participated in some of the trance experiments in the early 20s who Penelope Rosemont briefly mentions in her anthology on Surrealist women. There is another Suzanne, Suzanne Muzard, Breton's mistress who he names X at the end of *Nadja*, rhapsodizing as "The Wonderful One." Who are these women, these artistic-girls that flitter through portraits of this period, always elusive? On Google I find a photo of Suzanne Muzard: she is with another girl in one of the first photo-booths. A former prostitute, the Internet tells me (of course).

Breton was not in love with Nadja, he was just surgically fascinated with her. He is interested in her as a character, not as an embodied woman. He notes her "quite desperate" material conditions, that she had dealt cocaine and been taken to the police station. He offers to give her money in exchange for her company. It's almost like she has to perform to hold his interest, and when she becomes too needy or real he dumps her. He seems to despise her, in fact, as an ordinary suffering being. At the end he uses the fact of her institutionalizing for a poetic riff on containment, but this is really about the great (male) writers, not Nadja as a potential author or artist. Although at the end of *Nadja* there is some materialist critique that her isolation and poverty are what dooms her in society (her gender, I would also add), and that she was committed for disobeying the social codes of propriety. And yet he appears to agree with the dominant narrative that she is mad, and he never investigates what happens to her or visits her once she is put away. (He grows bored with her once he uses her for his own purposes, he wasn't faithful to his women he turned into characters.) Everyone who writes about this woman mythologized as Nadja repeats and accepts this master narrative that she was mentally ill, even though we know almost nothing of her life, we know that she was a patient of Janet (repeated in Wikipedia, "a mad patient of Pierre Janet"), and that her real name

was Leona Camille-Ghislaine D., that she died in the hospital in 1941, but we don't even know her last name. It is almost as if her narrative ends when HE is done with her. On Wikipedia, a maddening repetition: the Baroness was insane, her mother was insane. Yet the Baroness said to Djuna of her mother: "Djuna — she never one minute had been 'insane' but 'sane'! Honest!" (I love the aggressive ecstatic thrust of her epistolary style.)

What remains in the novels and in the dominant biographies surrounding these women is a skewed historical record that diagnoses and demonizes. The HAGiography or demonology — every remaining scrap is preserved and archived as evidence of genius, the women discarded or lost or mythologized (a form of being lost, for the real truth about their embodied life is never told, the telling was made nearly impossible). There are so many biographical details online relating to every woman tangentially connected to Henry Miller, every address where the married Millers lived, even trying to unravel the origins of Jean Kronski, the 21-year-old poet and artist who became a lover with June and who Henry made a character, everyone is obsessed with every detail of the godheads. She is important only as connective tissue to the Great Man.

The desire to write the other biography, the one that was not told. Like what Jean Rhys performs in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, rewriting the demonized Bertha Mason, breathing humanity into her, the mad-woman kept up in the cold cobwebby attic, loving her by telling her life, by seeing her, by rescuing her from one-dimensionality. These women who are flattened out as characters. Zelda crying out in the asylum that she is trapped in the pages of HIS book.

They know how to undress her but not how to unravel her. (Troppmann on Dirty: "I thought, no one can know her any less than I do.") Yet they didn't LOVE her. And by that I mean they didn't SEE her.

They forget or erase the real, embodied subject. Henry Miller and Anaïs Nin who try to untangle June's origins, to deconstruct the mysteries of their Robin Vote. "He enters the labyrinth with a notebook! In her place I might close up too," Nin writes. But so little is known still about June Miller, whose name is changed once she is married, whose origins are erased, like the mythology of any traditional wife, yet who also was somehow untraceable (more so Jean, who June helped mythologize as descending from the Romanoffs). Once they divorced we don't know much about what happened to June. What we can piece together is terribly sad. In the 40s moving around New York hotels like a down-and-out Veronica Lake or Frances Farmer, she may or may not have worked as a social worker (calling to mind her deep wells of empathy never really

documented in literature), she probably had electroshock in the 50s, when it was all the rage for rage-filled women, one particular horror story has her breaking bones while falling off the table during a session. Who knows whether it's true or not.

Can I examine any of these brilliant girls as heroines of a sort? Were they heroines? They were ultimately silenced and contained, institutionalized in asylums, where they experienced dehumanizing, degrading treatment. They suffered terribly (bodily, psychically). Also institutionalized in literary works that stole their identity.

When Jean Rhys writes that she is possessed with her character Antoinette Cosway, or when Anaïs Nin writes "I have become June"—is this different than Flaubert asserting that Emma Bovary IS him, that HE is SHE? Anaïs Nin who felt that she understood June Miller more than her husband ever could:

Yet I have given her life. She died in Paris. She died the night she read Henry's book [mss. of *Tropic of Cancer*] because of his butchery. She wept and repeated over and over again, "It is not me, it is not me he is writing about. It's a distortion. He says I live in delusions, but it is he, he who does not see me, or anyone, as I am, as they are. He makes everything ugly."

Of course Anaïs also did objectify June, by making her into a character, just like Djuna did with the Baroness and Thelma. Is making someone a character giving them life, or taking it away? Perhaps making someone a character is a way of alienating them from themselves, so that their lives are read through the character. Djuna did strip her real-life exemplars of their subjectivity (and artistry). Her rendering of Robin Vote does read, at times, as a one-dimensional revenge amidst an otherwise glorious novel about society's misfits who live in the gutter-margins (unless, like Duras with Lol Stein, she is making a commentary on her as the blank object of desire). But Djuna did love the Baroness, and worried over being faithful to her life, worried over using her life as material for the novel while stalled writing her promised biography in the 30s.

Consider the different advice she is given by her two literary advisors. There is the advice of her patriarch-editor, T.S. Eliot, about Barnes' portrayal of The Baroness in *Nightwood*: "So don't have any scruples about historical accuracy etc but just make USE of her." Versus the more empathic advice of Emily Holmes Coleman, herself the author of the gorgeous, hallucinatory novel of madness *The Shutter of Snow*, which draws from her own experience being institutionalized. Regarding the biography Barnes is attempting to write: "Think of her in as detached a way as you possibly can — not as a saint or madwoman, but as a woman of genius, alone in the world, frantic." In her letters the Baroness tells Djuna an agonizing

story of a mother dominated by an abusive husband (that story of how when her husband was gone for a business trip she took her two daughters out and got their haircut short, dressed them in the stylish yellow shoes of the time, redecorated, went on a shopping spree, all this was seen as symptomatic of her illness, the compulsive shopping, the Bovarizing). Her mother who died of uterine cancer in the sanitorium. "My mother broke into beautiful shattered scintillating noble pieces." In writing her mother the Baroness attempts to piece together these fragments, as Djuna attempts to resurrect her friend, tell the truth of her life.

So there is a difference, perhaps, in terms of how, say, Tennessee Williams collected women versus how André Breton collected women, all the tragic women that are portraits of his sister Rose forced into a lobotomy, his damaged Southern belles, his Blanche DuBois. Tennessee Williams who wrote a play about Zelda and wrote Jane Bowles's obituary. He LOVED them, the LOVE is apparent in his play he wrote about Zelda, *Clothes for a Summer Hotel*, from his later pulp period.

An author loves his or her character if he or she has ever, really, cried for her, not what she represents, but for her, for her sad, lost life, this LOST GENERATION of brilliant girls, all the sad young girls. I who am bellowing for my heroines.

My underlinings in my copy of *Nadja* while taking a seminar on Surrealism in my one year in grad school reflect my still unformed feminist foment: the girl trapped as character not author.

Perhaps that's why I find the narratives of Vivien(ne) and Zelda so haunting. Their erasure as subjects and subsequent demonizing is compelling in the context of the myths of modernism, but also they stand in for so many other anonymous bright girls, who never were able to become writers, who we'll never know about. Who were stopped somehow.

I align myself with a genealogy of erased women.

I wonder, what is the effect of being made a character if one wishes to be an author? Of being re(written)? Jane Bowles who became convinced that her husband Paul had written *Two Serious Ladies*. Zelda who was institutionalized again following the serialization of *Tender*. Louise Colet who took to bed when *Bovary* was serialized (she recognized herself in those pages, the details of their loverly trysts).

What prohibited June Miller from becoming like her idol Katherine, whose last name Mansfield she took as an homage prior to her marriage (she who only wrote letters)?

The violence, perhaps, of being made into an object.

The SCENES she throws (he incorporates it into his own SCENES,

she is scratched out, she cannot write).

Lucia crying, “I am the artist!”

Zelda in the asylum hallucinating Fitzgerald’s voice: “I have lost the woman I put in my book. O, I have killed her!”

Perhaps Madame Bovary’s disease is not boredom. It’s being trapped as the character in someone else’s novel.

Mirror, mirror. The hag hates the young girl. She wants to tear her heart out. She refuses an uncomfortable reflection — yet she once was young, she once was desired, she once was foolish. She is still doomed to caricature. And the young girl judges the hag — she thinks, I will never be like that, I will be loved, immortalized, forever, because I am special.

Eventually the beautiful, bright young girl runs away into the dark woods of anonymity. Heartbroken, torn to pieces. We don’t know what she thought of being drawn as a damsel in distress. Perhaps she grew up into a mad queen. For the most part we cannot access her narrative. She is lost to us. The lost girls.

Of course the two women are supposed to be enemies, not former and future selves.

All these myths of madness and the mirror. Who writes these myths? Who meditates on their reflections?

Young beautiful Narcissus who won’t leave the reflecting pool because he’s so obsessed with conjuring up his image.

The mirror. There is a crack in it.

Echo. Another myth of voice and silence. She is supposed to be in love with Narcissus, but really she's mesmerized by the sound of her own voice. One version writes that she becomes a ghost, invisible, yet still speaking. The sentence she is serving — she says the same one over and over again. Who is there? Who is there? She repeats herself, history. She is punished for revealing too much. She has a talent for speaking. She does not write down her words and so they are taken away. She babbles brims over just to say something just to hear herself speak — speak, why can't you speak.

All she can do is repeat — all she can do is repeat.

Mirror, mirror.

Who is fair? What is fair? Who gets to judge?

Part 2

We are visiting the mountain town of Asheville, a few hours away from where we now live in North Carolina. (A sudden reversal, I encourage John to take the position. We stay at my father's house in the northwest suburbs of Chicago for a week in December while waiting for the movers to deliver our belongings. Returning to my

childhood home, just like Zelda once she and Scott separated, a quiet life with her mother in Montgomery, punctuated by returns to the asylum or trips to exotic locales with her now-estranged spouse.)

While in Asheville we take a trip to the former campus of the Highland Hospital, where Zelda lived on and off, and finally died, trapped in a fire. A pilgrimage to see what remains. Which is physically only two buildings: the house of Dr. Carroll, and the main building, Highland Hall.

I walk around, trying to conjure up the past. The campus was bought out by Duke University long ago, and now houses a medical testing company. I take a picture of the soggy tennis court. Was it the same one Zelda played on during the day? Her physical exertions reported on by doctor to husband, seen as a sign of *progress*. She is always watched, surveyed. Her idea of progress wasn't theirs, yet she learns, yes, she learns to play the game. (I just want to work, she tells them. They won't let me work! Which was writing, or painting, or dancing. When she grew bored, bitter with being a character. When she wanted to transcend the wife role written for her. But stimulation was seen as bad for a woman's *moral character*.)

That rare photo of Zelda blinking crossly against the sun. Or was it at the photographer? She has aged — because of the series of institutions, the strange medicines, the suffering. No longer the sleek seal body of a swimmer, yet still athletic. Fed a diet of Dr. Carroll's peanut butter sandwiches on whole wheat (good, wholesome food, for good, wholesome girls and wives). I wonder which hill is the one she tromped up and down, to exhaust herself. Also volleyball and morning gymnastics. Along with this exercise she was allowed daily "occupational therapy" (she chose painting). Dr. Carroll was the one who injected her with horse serum, along with electroshock and insulin. (All these women writers who received a brigade of shock treatments, their doctors unconcerned about the resulting memory loss, how this can destroy a writer. Hemingway shot himself after the results of such "treatment.")

Scott bewildered by the ghostly echo his wife was changed into. Now a character he has not written. "I cannot live in this ghost town that Zelda has become." He just wanted her to return to being the girl, the flitting, flirty thing.

I wonder if the new complex on campus was built on the site of the destroyed dormitory, where women patients were locked inside their rooms and allegedly tied to their beds, making it impossible for them to escape during the fire. (I think of this as a sort of metaphor: locked up, confined, made *safe*.) Who were these other women, I wonder? What was the interior monologue of their unquiet minds? Or had they too been erased, subdued, rewritten?

SUPPRESS EVERYTHING SUPPRESSIBLE

I think about ghosts. I feel myself become more like a girlish, mischievous Zelda, light in my body as I jump up to walk along the rock fence that borders the campus, and steal under the yellow tape at Highland Hall to sit on a creaking lone white rocking chair. John takes my picture, but it is from too far away and I look removed, a stranger.

A tour bus goes through, necks straining, the man at his microphone: what mythology is he repeating? I imagine an alternative monologue — This is where Fitzgerald's wife spiritually died. And later, yes, her body too. And yet, and yet this was the site of her eternal return: she would beg to go back. Eventually she believed she must be protected from herself. Or perhaps she wanted to get away from her husband. Or her mother.

Regardless, for a moment maybe these tourists are silent, attuned to Zelda's story: a screwball comedy become tragedy.

Or perhaps the guide is now narrating that Nina Simone took singing lessons with Dr. Carroll's wife as a young girl.

In the car ride back to the hotel I think of Zelda's hair, her elegant neck shaved, the boyish bob of curls. My pixie cut is now growing out. I will cut it again, and again, in moments of fuzzy personal identity or panic. I muse whether I should take a picture of Zelda to the woman in Durham who now cuts my hair.

The small tributes I have been paying lately to Zelda as I have been reimmersed in the Fitzgerald legend, rereading the biographies — a glittery silver toenail polish from OPI's Swiss collection, an homage to her time in the Swiss asylum.

I am beginning to be able to channel them. Their different energies. Zelda, bold, forceful, capricious, then staunchly mute. A silent film star — like Louise Brooks. (Yet they left Louise Brooks alone, in her hermitage in upstate New York, to watch movies and reminisce and write her lovely lyric nasty essays of the past, as well as her attempts at a book-length memoir which she dubbed *Incinerator One* and *Incinerator Two*. Zelda was only left alone in the end, to write her increasingly feverish and religious texts, her writing that was also always a rewriting of her past, of the same circling narrative, the primary scenes.)

But in the bed on the stiff white hotel sheets my thoughts go to Viv — and for a moment, I can feel her, I am in her nervous body lying there.

While at the vegetarian restaurant, Laughing Seed, John and I fantasize about renting a cabin someday here in Asheville, or perhaps we can find a country cottage closer to his work in Chapel Hill, already disappointed with where we're living in Durham. So much

like the Eliots and Fitzgeralds, always searching, searching for some ideal sanctuary. Too bad they didn't have the ease of Craigslist.

She follows him where his work calls him," writes Simone de B of her archetypal wife whom she sees as willfully refusing sovereignty.

Funny. I never thought of myself as the sacrificial type.

I think of these literary wives who picked up and went where their husbands wanted to, to whichever Shangri-La where the men could finish *the book*—everything in service of an eventual masterpiece. The self-imposed exile of wifedom.

The subaltern condition of being a literary wife — she must believe in the myth of his eventual genius even before he has realized it. See also: literary sister (Wordsworth's) or mother (Flaubert's).

If the modern husbands/serious writers were widowers to their wives' maladies (an overwriting, as Tom and Paul were both sickly types, and Scott eternally sloppy), these women were widows to the cult of the book to be birthed. (She doomed to immanence, he allowed transcendence, or the time to procrastinate wildly and eventually get the words on the page, words marrying more words.)

The Bowles seemed to go wherever Paul needed to write, once he donned the cap of Author in the family, taking it from Jane's elfin head. Or he went alone. He was always heading off to some island or another. Even while Jane was stroked out at 40, in and out of hospitals.

Scott always changing his mind about what ideal environment he required to finish, cocktails included. *Tender* a drawn-out nightmare of nine years syncopated by Zelda's breakdowns and his sloshy lost weekends at whichever house they had landed: the gray country cottage in Connecticut or the mansion in Delaware. And then later the medical tourism that mimicked the mania of their earlier domestic retreats, a strange mirroring of their honeymoon years in Manhattan high-rises — Fitz living in and out of hotels while Zelda was institutionalized in Asheville.

Yet in our relationship, I am the Writer, the devouring ego. So much in service to the books that I write, except, of course, where we live.

I wonder why I didn't jump at the chance to finally live in New York, although we didn't have plans for how we would, exactly, support ourselves there. Why didn't Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* say fuck it all and move to Paris? Why didn't Zelda take the ballet solo she was offered in Naples, perhaps then avoiding further containment and spiritual death, choosing instead her current state of marital miserabilism?

Perhaps there is something to this feminine dread of happiness.

Or perhaps I was so desperate to get out of Akron I jumped at any chance to leave. I rehearse my lines. It is a wonderful opportunity for him. The economy and everything.

My life mirroring the mad wives more and more. Always moving, moving, moving.

We move in a blizzard, driving ten hours straight in our old Volvo station wagon, crossing the Mason-Dixon Line through the mountains of Appalachia the day after Christmas.

I have exited the Midwestern and am now entering the Southern gothic.

In Durham we live in a rehabilitated garment factory past downtown that houses residential lofts, offices, artist studios (much of the art is of the craft-fair variety — the clunky turquoise jewelry, the oiled, earnest portraiture). Once again, we move in sight unseen, our choice determined by what is available, what we can afford, rentals surprisingly costly compared to Chicago. We pick this place because they offered pictures and dimensions online, and John always fantasized about living in an urban, industrial loft. The pictures are gorgeous — we can picture our furniture inside, we even obsessively trace it out to scale in miniature to make sure everything fits.

Oh our modern lives. Days I'm more obsessed with looking up vintage Herman Miller chairs online than Henry Miller. (Oh Christ, I've become one of those essayists awash in their own privilege, yet I feel in many ways far far away from Joan Didion in her Malibu mansion.)

Upon arrival, the interior of the building could best be described as institutional — the white hallways and matching red doors. My office in the loft is a white cage without windows, except for a ceiling skylight. Boxes within boxes. It's my room, yes, it's my own. Yet a room of one's own can feel like a prison if there's no reason to leave it.

The complex is in a depressed, isolated area, with a project just down the street. Downtown Durham a curious mixture of farm-to-table restaurants written up in the *Times* (there's a wonderful farmer's market on Saturdays and an Italian sandwich place we frequent) in the midst of empty storefronts and then everywhere, just outside the frame, an abject, almost rural poverty. Nothing's walkable from where we live. Lately I have been living indoors. The ghost train bellowing in the distance.

I am unable to find work teaching, or any work really. We find upon arrival that North Carolina is a "right to work" state (no unions) and in the midst of a budget crisis. I had an interview at a used bookstore in Chapel Hill, part of me fancied this, a return to being

Woolf 's girl behind the counter. Ultimately, though, I was not offered the $10-an-hour job after I tried to wrangle the starting date so I could go with John to Scandinavia for a conference where he was giving a talk.

I entertain entering a frivolous femme period. I take on new selves and lives. In Chicago I buy two amazing dresses from my favorite boutique, sort of goth-flapper creations — they are my Jeanne d'Arc dresses, as Zelda said of the blue number in which she sauntered down the Champs-Élysées. I bought the dresses so I could bear living here and being the wife-of, and having no employment possibilities to speak of, even though with losing my paltry teaching income we couldn't afford them. I bought the dresses so I could start acting out some version of witchy debutantism or eccentric post-flapperism.

Of course I don't wear them, because I don't leave the house, and instead I lounge around braless in sweaty T-shirts and pajama bottoms, attempting to write something. Attempting to survive the room, the afternoon. And I don't have any boulevard upon which to indulge in *flânerie*.

Days I feel like Maya Deren trapped inside the house in the Hollywood Hills in *Meshes of the Afternoon*, stabbing at ghosts and doubles.

I know I should leave the house when I am stuck, stalling, but I feel this clawing inside, like if I do not write well I do not deserve the day. I tend to slink into a slothlike demi-existence, watching things behind a screen. This as opposed to doing housework to fill up the time, which often terrifies me, the notion of filling up time, something about the silence and banality of the quotidian.

Some days the only way to escape from my life, and the screens, is to sink into a bath. Sylvia Plath writing in *The Bell Jar* about the spiritual effects of a hot soak. I gather up all my books and read them with wet fingers. Except we live in a green building, so the bathtub stops pouring hot too soon, leaving me only half-submerged, my breasts and stomach embarrassed, exposed.

I go under the water. Relax into blankness.

I am Ophelia, drowning in the pool of my own emotions.

Yet when things are too intense, when I cannot do anything productive, I can still blog the emotional upheavals and anxieties of my current and changing existence. I compulsively blog through the slog and sludge of my days. Anais Nin's "opium habit" of her diary that Otto Rank wanted to cure her from. Gratifying to know I have readers at the other end, fellow writers from around the world writing me little notes of encouragement in the comments sections. The Internet cages me. The Internet also allows me to communicate through the day, a dialogue. It allows me to fight against my own

erasure.

Online I write about my body, currently in revolt. Another reason for the constant hot baths: lately my periods have made me a prisoner of my body. Bowed over with cramps, I am now bedded for days, heating pad, drugs, moaning. Until it becomes too expensive to keep up I go for twice-weekly acupuncture appointments in Chapel Hill — at the beginning, this is what gets me out of the house. How exquisitively tender my body has become — the bruised acupuncture point over my uterus, the agony of my digestive tract. At the doctor's office there are *Audubon* and bicycling magazines — a step up, I suppose, from the gendered periodicals of Akron, auto magazines and *Ladies' Home Journal* or *US Weekly*. There is one *Vogue* with Anne Hathaway grinning horsily from the cover that I reread every time I am there.

They don't know what the fuck's wrong with me, it's probably a combination of IBS and worsening endometriosis, but so far I have eschewed more surgical investigations (I AM MADAME OVARY). John and I endlessly discuss the state of my bowels like Tom with Viv. All the mad wives, once they are named as ill, obsessively recording every aspect of the organic. Following whatever routine they thought would provide relief — while all along it is impressed upon them that it's probably psychological, the result of nerves.

Did Zelda think she was ill? She too became a patient-patient.

I have begun to watch minutely whatever I eat. I take notes next to a new list of potential supplements, the old diet of white soft digestibles thrown out, now I regard gluten as the new potential villain. Probiotics, evening primrose, enzymes, cal-mag. I consider going the raw food route for about a week, watching a stream of unintentionally hilarious videos on Youtube, featuring suburban housewives guiding me through making a raw kale salad with avocado, the diamond rings glittering on their hands, massaging the greens with oil. I wonder at the impetus behind these anonymous women's elaborate diets. There are so many steps, soaking, dehydrating, sprouting, etc., one could spend all day preparing food that is demolished in minutes.

Sometimes I worry I have become one of those women I used to pity.

During the day I engage in my various obsessions with the lives of fictional characters.

Virginia Woolf begins *Room* circling around the topic of Women and Fiction, asking whether she is supposed to discourse about women who write fiction or women who *are* fictions. In her essays on literary women collected in *Seduction and Betrayal*, including an essay on

Zelda, the critic Elizabeth Hardwick makes a similar move — all of these women are characters to her, and she's interested in their analysis, whether they are Ibsen's heroines or the Brontë sisters. But perhaps that's because many of these women — especially the unhappy wives she circles around — were characters. Even if some later attempted to become authors. And she too was a character as well as an author: "Lizzie" in her ex-husband Robert Lowell's poetic cycle *The Dolphin*, playing the abandoned, angry wife with such aplomb. It was in the aftermath of Lowell leaving Hardwick for another writer, the beautiful novelist-aristocrat Lady Caroline Blackwood, that Hardwick became a theorist of the literary wife, or as she put it, the "text of the family" (although she was really only interested in the dyad, the "bobbed coupling," to use Lowell's phrase in his *Dolphin* cycle, which vampirized both her voice and Caroline's).

It is HIS book. She doesn't write herself.

Zelda was always stuck as a character in his literature. Leaving her organza dresses and Montgomery, Alabama for Patou suits and Manhattan in that honeymoon year, abandoning her life as a local celebutante to a different, grander sort of celebrity, one where she was always inextricably linked to her husband, who was seen as her author.

Elizabeth Hardwick part of the exodus of American girls, the generation after Zelda, who traveled alone by train to the big city. Hardwick who came to New York from Kentucky to study the metaphysical poets at Columbia University, John Donne and the rest, and whose goal, she said, was to become a "New York Jewish intellectual," later helping found *The New York Review of Books*, where most of the essays in *Seduction and Betrayal* first appeared. (I love that anecdote Hardwick tells in an interview, that she decided to study 17th century English literature because it was all the rage, because of T.S. Eliot maybe, but after her first seminar she woke up, panicked, that she didn't know when the 17th century was, her literary knowledge beginning at 1920.)

Hardwick and her friend, the novelist and critic Mary McCarthy, the pretty girls of the *Partisan Review* crowd. They were in the generation of brilliant girls, promiscuously read and bedded, who went to college, moved to New York from Lexington, Kentucky, and Portland, Oregon, respectively. And both had a thrillingly liberated period in the city before their eventual and expected marriages (in Mary's case, several).

Zelda was free too, that first year in New York — Scott and her swinging through the glass doors of the Plaza, no rules, rich and unmoored — but then later, she learned, there were rules, of course, she learned once she had apparently broke them.

The critic Edmund Wilson, married to McCarthy, was the lynchpin between the two worlds — he was Fitzgerald's roommate at Princeton and then later part of the Fitzgerald social set. Wilson was one of those who survived, who cherrypicked their second wives out of that new crop of girls who were not only personalities like Zelda but also known and accepted as talented writers. Mary McCarthy said she felt "dragooned" into the whole thing with Wilson, like the young Robert Lowell, strong-arming the fiction writer Jean Stafford into marriage. Stafford finally accepted after he fucked up her face in a car crash. Lowell known as "Cal" from his schoolboy days, for both the despotic emperor Caligula and the *Tempest* sprite Caliban.

In a row on my bookshelf, I have the books of Lowell's wives — Stafford, Hardwick, Blackwood — all republished by *The New York Review of Books* in candy-colored paperbacks. I organize my bookshelves by literary gossip.

If John and I mimic any migratory pattern it's probably not the modernists, it's this American generation that came afterwards, that viewed the modernists as gods. That generation moved where their husbands could get even temporary faculty appointments in the wilds of American academe. So Hardwick left her chosen city, reluctantly, to follow Robert Lowell to Boston (a city she detested) for his post at Harvard, moved even to Iowa, which she found "flat and ugly."

Perhaps there was always hope they would go abroad again. Hardwick in her later novel *Sleepless Nights* remembering so lovingly their year abroad as young marrieds, Italy, Holland (forgetting the Italian music student Lowell ran off with, the psychotic break, the Munich army hospital, him expecting her to travel to Amsterdam alone to find a place for them to live because this is where he was convinced he would write his masterpiece).

We too desire the transatlantic so desperately. There is always this hope that one of these moves will be back there, to a more voluptuous and glamorous alienation.

I am terribly lonely here. In my loneliness I've become ornate with the rituals of makeup. I invent more steps because there is more time. (Although some days I don't even wash my face.) I go for counseling sessions at Sephora. I consume. I am consumed. I buy make-up I don't need, don't use. I ask advice about concealer from the girl with the ring on her glossy pink lip. I feel now that we are almost friends, that she recognizes me.

I buy a NARS blush called Madly.

So much of what I've done since I moved here is react to containment — I tweeze and pick away at myself, agonize over the shape of my eyebrows, my clothes, my bangs.

Lately I have been fantasizing again about having an affair. It seems to come with these moves, the sense that I don't really have a life outside of John's. When we are out in public I find myself casting around to see a man I would sleep with. At a recent poetry reading (occasions which usually make me feel sleepy, like I am at church) I find myself mildly fantasizing about the man sitting next to me with a potbelly, a librarian type, basically a less attractive version of John. I tell John this and we laugh.

I buy a NARS lipgloss called Orgasm.

In the first story in Mary McCarthy's strikingly contemporary collection *The Company She Keeps*, the young wife has an affair, but McCarthy makes clear that she is doing this in order to be a character again in a new drama, to be seen and reinterpreted anew. From then on the character becomes again the single girl in the city, sleeping with or involved with a string of inappropriate men, and then, at the end, remarried, but in therapy (both therapy and affairs forms of transference practiced by these women, both perhaps about being your own character again).

But more than anything I crave female companionship. Like what Edna Pontellier found with Adele Ratignolle in *The Awakening*, more important for her self-actualization than the affairs. There are the women writers, almost all who also keep personal blogs, who I commune with in the comments section of *FFIMS*, eventually in long email chains swapping intimacies, worrying whether our missives are inappropriate or icky, venting the sometimes alienation of our current existences, sometimes inside (the domestic sphere, our relationships) and outside (as writers, in our jobs, often as adjuncts). Sometimes, when traveling for readings or visiting family, I see these confidantes in person, like Suzanne when I go back to Chicago, although oftentimes it feels more comfortable to wait until we're back behind our screens to resume any real intimacy. I feel instead formal, unused to having to be socially fluid. Or often, my fellow darling agoraphobes, they don't make it out to a reading I'm doing, preferring to stay inside.

Like the mad wives, these women form another invisible community for me — for we too feel invisible, but together we rally against our own erasure. My blog a way for me to negotiate and deal with this loneliness.

Yet, communicating via email or in a comments thread is not the same as getting coffee with someone. Or, I don't know, pedicures. Or yoga. Isn't that what female friends do together? Something simple, felt. The wife of a librarian at Duke, one of John's colleagues, has reached out to me, and even though I really like her, I find myself afraid, feeling too fucked up to have real friends in my embodied

existence. I'm seemingly always depressed and anxious about some sort of deadline or reading or project — who wants to be friends with someone that self-involved? The woman doing my makeup at the Chanel counter at Nordstrom turns out to be a wife of one of John's colleagues, she tells me she is an artist. I go visit her and she puts on Audrey Tatou red lips for me at my request. I buy the lipstick. But still mostly: chitchat, nothing too personal. I don't even remember her name.

The friendships I keep up online feel safer. And yet my relationships with these intellectual (and emotional) women is much more complex, our communications forming a rhythm, months of silence when life gets too intense for us. We are all so sensitive, difficult. I wonder if this is like the friendship Elizabeth Hardwick and Mary McCarthy had. Lifelong frenemies, redlipsticked and tightsweatered, highballs and cigarettes in hand. Sometimes it seems impossible to be real friends with other women writers, we are all such trainwrecks, messes, it seems, but sometimes it seems impossible to be real friends with other women who do not identify primarily as writers. Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf: We spoke of silence.

As I walk around Chapel Hill after meeting John for lunch, I think of Zelda as a new mother isolated in the "Ibsenesque" winters in St. Paul. She didn't get along with most of the other country club wives. But also Elizabeth Hardwick in Iowa, living the life of the faculty wife. She became obsessed with a murder trial that she later wrote a true-crime sort of novel about, which I haven't read.

Zelda and Elizabeth Hardwick, two Southern belles: one whimsical and excessive, spoiled and fragrant, the other intellectual and powdered, polite yet vicious. Both absolutely, indisputably brilliant.

But I can only describe Hardwick's view of this other, famous, literary wife — who was also, famously, plagiarized by her husband — as a position of profound ambivalence. She calls Zelda "this strange, vulnerable girl from Montgomery, Alabama." Yet even while herself experiencing the stuckness that can be living through a spouse, in her essay, ostensibly a review of Zelda's biography — the biography was quite famous — Hardwick also sees Zelda as a "paragon of an unhappy woman." Nancy Milford's bio became a sort of *cri de femme* of the Second Wave when published, Zelda heralded by the first generation of American women's studies students in the 70s as both a heroine of some resistance but mostly a glamorous victim, like a literary Marilyn Monroe. This leaves a bad taste in Hardwick's mouth, the idea of the victim. The sense that if Zelda was not complaining, Milford is complaining in her stead. I measure her portrait of Zelda

next to her portrait of Ibsen's Hedda Gabler, whom she is rather in awe of (as she is with her contemporary Sylvia Plath) for her spectacle of destruction, but sees no "political or philosophical content to her unhappiness." Hardwick imagines Hedda, like Zelda, as a rather stuck and unhappy wife, maybe the most common female character in literature. But at the time she was writing about these women Hardwick did not conceptualize their chronic unhappiness as political or philosophical.

Perhaps this is what obsesses me about Hardwick, besides being a huge fan of her writing. I am fascinated with how she situates herself as a writer and intellectual, gaining entrance into the male literary world, which involved a denial that she had to work twice as hard at being both writer and wife. Though she and Mary McCarthy struggled in volatile and often oppressive relationships (and she too was made a character), she was ultimately not destroyed, like Zelda and Vivien(ne) from the previous generation. Any mirror though with this generation of literary wives before is an uncomfortable one. I read her vocal ambivalence regarding feminism as a sort of internalized disciplining and punishment. This ambivalence both a deflection and identification with these women; she puts herself inside these narratives and distances herself from them. The sacrifice and eye-rolling over the bad woman, so as to redeem the woman writer in the male cultural industry, so as to validate her own fraught decisions. The martyr-wife, firmly steeped in self-abnegation.

Hardwick's attitude towards Zelda also recalls the essayist's ambivalent relationship to her contemporaries, like the poet Adrienne Rich, fellow housewife and neighbor in the Boston suburbs, who later left her economics professor husband in a spectacular controversy among the group. Her poetry collection, *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*, is the talking-back of the woman housewife paralyzed by impotence and futility, trying to write, to create herself. A dis-ease of unhappiness and a cloaked silence passed down among women isolated, each to their own roof, house, husband, empty routine. Hardwick so horrified by the metamorphosis of her former friend, who later came out as a lesbian, her friend who rallied to her defense in *The American Poetry Review* upon publication of *The Dolphin* (Lowell dismissed the review as "dogmatic feminism" and relegated Rich afterwards in his Harvard seminars to the category of "minor"). "She deliberately made herself ugly and wrote these extreme and ridiculous poems," Hardwick remarked. Hardwick was most likely shocked by the anger in these poems. (Later in life though Hardwick expressed an admiration for Rich.)

It is the FURY of Sylvia Plath, another peer, that makes Hardwick in an essay on the poet both so enraptured and uncomfortable. Sylvia

like a *dybbuk*-double. Sylvia who was Lowell's student in his writing class at Boston University, along with fellow housewife-poet Anne Sexton. Sylvia who only took the mask off for her poetry. The striptease of the *Ariel* femme fatale persona, the burlesque of trauma. Plath's housewife's revenge. The head in the gas oven. A brilliant symbol of both the Holocaust and the contained housewife. The feminine mystique is to return back to the smile — Sylvia swallowed this and then spat it out, sarcastically—"And I a smiling woman."

I have always been curious about the special ambivalence Elizabeth Hardwick reserved for Sylvia, with whom she socialized at dinner parties (in a journal entry Sylvia recalls meeting a "high-strung" Hardwick). The curiousness and yes admiration towards a woman seething with hate and anger, a betrayed wife with her fierce revenge. And yet Elizabeth too was the furious, abandoned woman, her voice so clear in *The Dolphin* poems, she is not only character but co-author: "*Don't you dare mail us the love your life denies*." Elizabeth Hardwick almost suicidal when reviews of the book came out. Dreading, she wrote Elizabeth Bishop, future biographies of Lowell theorizing the life of "Lizzie."

In her essay on Sylvia, Hardwick reveals both a resistance to as well as a shuddering admiration for the woman who burned her husband Ted Hughes's works in progress, his volumes of Shakespeare. Sylvia who allegedly wrote a revenge fantasy about their marriage and then burned it. She who burned. A femme fatale — fatal to others, to herself. Hurtling herself headlong off cliffs. She is Heathcliff and Cathy. Sickened on the moors. Hardwick finds a danger to such confessionalism, to her self-immolation:

Orestes rages, but Aeschylus lives to be almost seventy. Sylvia Plath, however, is both heroine and author, when the curtain goes down, it is her own dead body there on the stage, sacrificed to her plot.

Yet she also sees a victory in the *Ariel* poems, in the manuscript left on the desk, completed and in her chosen order, her last will and testament: "When she died she was alone, exhausted from writing, miserable — but triumphant too, achieved, defined and defiant." The period Sylvia herself called THE BLOOD JET, the fervent fevered creativity that gave way to the *Ariel* poems, the flat, the phone, the snow, the mistress, the writing oh the writing she who was reading Oester-reich on demonic possession and she was possessed by her *dybbuk* channeling that femme fatale that voice, that eat-glass voice, Sylvia breaking free. These poems of glittering hate and demons breathing softly then screaming, screaming was her alchemy, her rebirth.

I think of Zelda — who saved herself for a time. She refused to

show her husband her writing. She refused to destroy her pages. She refused to censor. Until she did. I think of Sylvia. She too saved herself at the end. She kept her writing from her husband, the fascist whom she loved. She devoured herself like the Sphinx at the end.

Yet perhaps taking oneself back as character is the ultimate revenge.

In her criticism Hardwick refutes the notion that women writers have a different lot than men. In her essay on Sylvia Plath Hardwick writes, "Every artist is either a man or a woman and the struggle is pretty much the same for both." It's amazing to me. When I think of Jean Stafford rising at dawn to work as a secretary at *The Southern Review* (Lowell was studying with Robert Penn Warren at Louisiana State), then coming home to prepare the boys lunch, the poets still lolling around hungover from the night before. And yet she still found time to write. Sylvia waking at four a.m., to be writer before wife. Typing up Ted's poems. They were their husband's secretaries, like Viv was to Tom. Yes, their husbands were more supportive of their wives as writers for the most part than the generation before (barring the Paul Bowles and Leonard Woolfs), Edmund Wilson locking Mary into a room to make her write the stories that would make her debut collection, but these wives were still expected to be the good wife and mother as well. Even Hardwick admits in her essay on Plath that being a mother meant one had to devote one's energy to raising children in the first couple of years, not writing. I think her general attitude has to do with the philosophy of the time that to be a feminist was to complain. "People with a real gift for writing find the time, people with no talent complain all the time," she once said.

"Will you wife me?" That means — make me breakfast, tea and water me, so I can pursue intellectual work. An active verb, interchangeable, regardless of gender. In reality, John wifes me far more than I wife him. A sort of paralysis has set in since we moved again and he does the great majority of the cooking and wifing. I know how lucky I am. How every morning I wake up enveloped in support and love. How John considers it way more important that I have a successful day writing than anything else. He allows me my moods, my myopia.

Scott would be so furious that Zelda wouldn't pick up after him. She was as slobby as he was. "During the spring of 1920, Fitzgerald tried to be a writer in the confusion of hotel rooms. Zelda was not interested in housekeeping," a biographer writes. Her recipe entitled "Breakfast" published in a cookbook of celebrity wives. As always, a punchline:

See if there is any bacon, and if there is, ask the cook which pan

to fry it in. Then ask if there are any eggs, and if so try to persuade the cook to poach two of them. It is better not to attempt toast, as it burns very easily. Also, in the case of bacon, do not turn the fire too high, or you will have to get out of the house for a week. Serve preferably on china plates, though gold or wood will do if handy.

Later, her poor housekeeping was actually considered symptomatic of her illness. Her "reeducation training"—the disordered or "schizophrenic" woman needed to be reindoctrinated into her role as the good wife, the good mother.

By contrast, the woman writers of the following generation unconsciously internalized this lesson. They might have been a generation of women allowed to be free when they were single, but once married they were plunged into all the traditions. They became, again, the angel in the house, echoing the Victorian woman. Like Adele Ratignolle in *The Awakening*, knitting woolen booties for her babies while in the sweltering summer heat.

When I beg John to sabotage the Internet somehow (dismantle our modem, find hiding places for the cord), I am almost maniacally productive with housework. Although I still seldom leave the house. The existential absurdity of a Jeanne Dielman, the filmmaker Chantal Akerman's Belgian housewife and prostitute played by Delphine Seyrig, the endless repetition and do-over of banal domestic chores.

Sylvia Plath and her elaborate meals sketched out, so proud of her meringue. The "exquisite, elaborate, labor-intensive dinner parties and holiday celebrations" of Mary McCarthy. She like some sort of domestic goddess — and the two apocalyptic fights between her and Wilson were over these sorts of details, the first big one dealing with blue sheets, which Mary had purchased and were some sort of departure from the traditional white sheets. I can't really figure out exactly what happened, but the fight triggered a breakdown, landing Mary in the mental ward with a black eye (continuing the tradition of his friend Scott, Wilson checked himself into a hotel in New York during the course of her treatment).

Every week John and I watch a TV show called *The Good Wife* on my laptop. It stars Julianna Margulies as the wife of a disgraced Chicago state's attorney who in the aftermath of his sex scandal is forced to develop a public face for the cameras, while inside she is undergoing the agonies and joys of transformation, as she begins to work again as a lawyer and have an identity outside of this Chicago Clintonesque power couplet. The actress is fantastic in the role. Her manicured face like some sort of Kabuki mask that she only occasionally lets fall. Which makes the cracks and fissures, some sign of an emotional tempest, all the more tantalizing.

Jeanne Dielman with that violent gesture of destruction at the

end — the perfect housewife inevitably snaps.

I have begun to buy cut flowers with abandon. “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.” Orange tulips at the table. The most decadent rhonoculus in a vase at my desk. I never quite understood why there were such detailed descriptions of flora in Southern novels. Zelda’s descriptions of flowers in *Save Me the Waltz* are so lush and voluptuous, I am struck reading it again by the associative brilliance of her novel. But living here, in early spring, with everything so — florid and gorgeously overgrown, I understand it. I cannot take in enough beauty, the flowering trees, all so vivid in creams and poignant magentas and golds and pinks. Spiky blossoms and little crunchy blossoms. Forsythia a yellow so intense it makes one happy to behold — I have branches in a vase on the floor. And the trees are blooming. Everything is blooming. Cherry blossoms and magnolias and dogwoods. I go around examining all of the textures.

When we are together on the weekend I can truly live here. This weekend hiking on a trail in the Duke forest, and then in the evening the Kronos Quartet playing Steve Reich compositions. And afterwards we wandered around Duke’s campus and even though my eyes were itchy and my throat scratchy from allergies I took in all of the vividness. And John and I dressed up — over-dressed in a way — there is something wonderful about the experience of being overdressed. I wore my new striped dress with the bustle in back, and John wore a striped blazer and tie. We post pictures we take of ourselves on Facebook. Terribly in love with ourselves, like Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jean Seberg mugging in front of the mirror in Godard’s *Breathless*. So ridiculous and vain, like the Fitzes. Look at us. Look at our perfect, seamless lives.

The eventual revolt from life that appears at the surface to be a polished magazine ad: Esther Greenwood scattering her Bloomingdales wardrobe out of the window from the New York high-rise. Zelda burning her dresses in the bathtub.

And I a smiling woman.

Mary McCarthy and Elizabeth Hardwick refused to see the category of WIFE as containing or defining them. Like the Bloomsbury women with Mrs. Eliot, they ignored the mere “wives” at the *Partisan Review* cocktail parties. Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* came out in 1963, the same year as Rich’s *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*, documenting the unspoken paralysis among neighborhoods of college-educated housewives. I’m imagining McCarthy or Hardwick did not feel that Betty Friedan was speaking to them, that they transcended that status because they were writers. Yet feminism as it sprang up in

the suburbs and between housewives was partly about others recognizing a pain that was internal, invisible, a quotidian suffering. The wideness and monotony of the day. What Friedan called "the problem that has no name." A paralyzing unhappiness on the inside. The Colgate smile on the surface.

These women thought they could do it all — there was no need for feminism. Hardwick's moralizing take on Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*—fine, leave the husband, but couldn't she take the children? The mocking tone of Hardwick's essay she wrote on Simone de B's *The Second Sex*, which begins in an ecstatic sneering list: "Vassal, slave, inferior, other, thing, victim, dependent, parasite, prisoner — oh, bitter, raped, child-swollen flesh doomed to immanence!" No one could be more exacting or more cutting than Hardwick in her essays — Lowell who wrote of his wife's acidic prose: "your shrill invective/ scorched the traditional South."

In the essay on *The Second Sex* her position is kind of like — yeah, okay, great, but who exactly is supposed to do the housekeeping? Mary herself fumed: "Feminism is ridiculous. Feminists are silly idealists who want to be on top. There is no real equality in sexual relationships — someone always wins." Perhaps they felt they were pragmatists. Yet Hardwick later reversed, or at least altered, her eyerolling stance on both feminism and Simone de Beauvoir, a sort of latent or revived consciousness perhaps brought about by the end of her marriage. However, throughout Hardwick's essays there's this (Southern?) moral stance about this immutable category of womanhood, very feminine and almost fatalistic: that is just how things are, amazed at Sylvia's fury or ruffled at Zelda's torment. No patience for the less resilient.

And yet these women's marriages were agonies. Jean Stafford's mental breakdowns and alcoholism. Lowell was abusive and even broke her nose a second time, the first time being the disfiguring car crash. (He also most likely hit Hardwick.) Mary McCarthy's breakdown four months into her marriage with Edmund Wilson, he allegedly kicked and punched her while pregnant (in their fights she hit back, perhaps sometimes she instigated it). Wilson demonized her as a hysteric during their messy divorce proceedings.

And then Elizabeth Hardwick, Lizzie, the long-suffering Penelope, always waiting for Robert Lowell to return from his manias and mistresses. Who gave up everything for him — even her teaching, which she loved, to move with him to London, but before that happened he fell in love with another, this time more permanently. Lowell who died in the cab en route to Kennedy Airport, coming back to his "Lizzie," a much delayed homecoming. "West 67th Street," please, carrying with him "Girl in bed," the Lucian Freud portrait of a

young Lady Caroline Blackwood.

A doubling — Caroline as a sobbing mess at Lowell's abrupt funeral, she flew in from London and stayed with the first widow, who as always, with her firm unshaking hand, took care of everything, just as she flew to London to cut Lowell's shoulder-length hair and have his clothes cleaned and pressed when he had to be institutionalized again. Before she left London she slipped him a note: "If you'll need me, I'll always be there. If you don't, I'll not be there." Always the sacrificial wife. Hardwick once said to Lowell that she would kill herself if it would save him from his mental breakdowns. These cults these women formed to their godlike literary husbands that involved a suppression of the self — Viv, Zelda the generation before. Hardwick who said that her marriage, even in its humiliating denouement, was the best thing that ever happened to her.

What's so infuriating and compelling about Hardwick's criticism and some of her public reactions to her life with Lowell, as well as her two books written BC and AC (before and after Cal) is how they seemingly contradict each other. There is in both the early novel *The Ghostly Lover* and *Sleepless Nights* a nostalgia for a freer life when young, when one was a sovereign being. In her early work, reviewed by the *Times* as a "rather unformed *Bildungsroman*" there is such a spark of something else, a desire for life to be different, an ambivalence to the certainty of marriage that mirrors *The Bell Jar*, which Hardwick herself dismisses as a conventional schoolgirl novel.

It's infuriating to think how coming-of-age-novels about the feminine experience are read and dismissed as chick lit or school-girl books or YA, etc., when Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise*, surely also a very unformed *Bildungsroman*, is still considered great literature. Carson McCullers, Shirley Jackson, Plath, all lumped into young adult. As if the female coming-of-age experience is somehow more frivolous or less rending than the male one. And how these works are seldom read as existential novels about girls who want to realize themselves, who want to be artists, and the desire not to have their future decided for them. Sylvia's dark, distorted, Dostoyevskian vision in *The Bell Jar*, Esther decides not to participate, not to be the perfect image, and so she unravels.

Actually it's remarkable how similar the two novels are — two bright young girls staying in a boarding house in New York City, flattened out by their future, by the idea of marriage, wanting to be artists. (Hardwick's character is pursuing piano lessons, Esther Greenwood wants to write.) Of course Plath's work has the rather more spectacular solution of breakdown and attempted suicide as a way out of the planned traditional role, as opposed to the character in *The Ghostly Lover* who at the end simply walks away from the

certainty of being a bride into a more ambiguous future.

Zelda summering as a child in the mountains of North Carolina, where she was feted, safe. Her childhood where she was free to run wild, like Edna Pontellier remembering the exhilaration of running through the wild grasses of Kentucky. Esther Green-wood zipping down the ski hill in *The Bell Jar*.

In *The Ghostly Lover*, like in *The Bell Jar*, marriage is the eternal question mark, these girls in the boarding house pursuing bright futures while waiting, somehow, for the inevitable closing-off, and except for the terrible title it's a beautiful book, with great psychological insight into the interiority of women. And an absolute *lament* for the shadow life of the traditional wife.

I follow John to work, in his wedding-cake of a building with the grand chandeliers. A take your wife to work day.

Please don't leave me, I say in the morning, on these foul-weather days, these mean reds. Please don't leave me alone to myself.

In the poem "Marriage?" Robert Lowell captures the voice of his new wife, Caroline Blackwood, lamenting her own abandonment. "I think about you every minute of the day./I love you every minute of the day/You gone is *hollow, bored, unbearable*." He wrote Caroline as the mermaid in *The Dolphin*, his work about the abandonment of one marriage (to Hardwick now the hag), and the entanglement with another, "bright as the morning star or a blonde starlet." Although she was a writer too, she hated being the muse, the blonde pensive girl in bed, the golden girl, the Zelda figure.

"Frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment."

I've always found the language of the borderline personality diagnosis, a label assigned to women almost entirely, compelling in that it's an identity disorder which is defined almost exclusively by not actually having an identity. As well as the intensity, the enormity, of one's emotions. Zelda often saddled posthumously and anachronistically with this diagnosis by that great diagnostician, the Internet.

"Women diagnosed as borderline present a crisis in subjective feelings about themselves. They may describe feeling empty, unreal, numb, or even nonexistent."

The borderline: an unstable, fragmented, even missing self.

Who Are You? — the title of Anna Kavan's haunting inquiry into the loss of the self in marriage. Jean Rhys wished she had thought of the title herself for *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The 1963 novella is actually a rewrite of *Let Me Alone*, her earlier, more conventional novel published under the name of Helen Ferguson (taking on the surname of the husband she abhorred). In *Let Me Alone* the character Anna

Kavan is stuck in the tropics with her bureaucratic jerk of a husband. In *Who are You?* Kavan, now taking as her author name the name of her previous heroine, rewrites Helen Ferguson's 300-plus-page novel into an experimental novella as anorexic as the ice girl heroines of this later period. The controlling yet basically harmless husband becomes the sadistic "Mr. Dog Head," whose favorite activities include raping his wife and bludgeoning rats with his tennis racket. The lonely wife Anna Kavan is now simply "the girl," living in a nightmare she can't escape, losing her identity in the stifling heat.

I wander downstairs to the exhibits, where there is a glass case devoted to Chang and Eng, the pair of conjoined twins first coined as Siamese, who apparently settled on a farm in North Carolina after their circus days, married sisters and fathered a team of children. I wonder how that worked (apparently the brothers would visit a different sister each night, but I don't know whether they both fucked her or what).

At the Mütter Museum in Philadelphia, below the cased-in plaster molds of the dying Eng brothers, their gray hairs sticking out from the plaster, lies their two livers, lovingly entertwined in formaldehyde. Apparently one of them died (Chang? Or Eng?) and even though they rushed to separate them the other one slipped into a coma and died shortly after.

In the Duke Gardens, we sit and watch the black swans. They are always together, they seem to have arrived in pairs.

Merce Cunningham on life without John Cage: "On the one hand, when I come home at the end of the day, and John's not there. On the other hand, I come home and John's not there."

The incestuous dyad of marriage. In Roland Barthes' book of literary aphorisms about romance, *A Lover's Discourse*, one category is "engulfment," citing Goethe's Werther and his fatal love. A lack of boundaries between the two.

"I am engulfed, I succumb."

R.D. Laing writes of this as well, the feeling of being drowned within another, all the ground laid for him for the formation of a schizoid personality.

Dicole: how Nicole and Dick sign their names in *Tender*. (This is a common trope of fanforums — two characters referred to by their combined names, as if by the crush of other people's desires they become welded into one singular entity.)

In Zelda's companion novel of marriage, *Save Me the Waltz*, she depicts the couple's love as narcissistic and submerging, in one early scene the heroine Alabama explores inside the brain of her beloved, through one ear. Alabama wavers between experiencing both the dizzying ecstasy of the dyad, as well as the struggle towards

sovereignty, the desire to disentangle. Unlike Fitzgerald's novels there's a self-consciousness in the Zelda figure that she is playing a part. In *Waltz* we get a sense of the heroine's daily insurrections, her loneliness and apartness.

"Yes — but David, it's very different to be two simple people at once — one who wants to have a law to itself and the other who wants to keep all the nice old things and be safe and loved and protected."

In *The Company She Keeps*, McCarthy writes of the loss of self through these relationships, through marriage, by existing through men. From McCarthy's foreword: "'When did you have it last?' the author adjures the distracted heroine, who is fumbling in her spiritual pocket-book for a missing object, for the ordinary, indispensable self that has somehow got mislaid. It is a case of lost identity."

I need to become more independent, I realize. It is nothing John does, really, it is me, I am on his time when we are together, he sets the hours and the minutes, he sets the alarm, I wake up when he does, when he can wake me, he is up first, I am always asleep…On weekends when I am still supposed to write it is so much better, so much easier, to lie in his arms, dizzy after making love, just luxuriating in each other.

I've always been in awe of Plath's schedule, how she saved herself, she saved herself as she lost herself, awaking at 4 am every morning, before the other roles of her life began.

That scene in *The Awakening* always speaks to me, the one where Edna refuses to go to bed with her husband when he tells her it's time. The sign of her first awakening, her coming to consciousness. Such a minor yet potent rebellion. It is after she goes swimming the first time. The disentangling of the self from the "we."

"She perceived that her will had blazed up, stubborn and resistant. She could not at that moment have done other than denied and resisted."

My students always read *The Awakening* like a romance novel, the young women especially, they want things to work out between Robert and Edna, they want those crazy kids to get together like it's *Twilight* or something, like they're star-crossed lovers. And I have to tell them that that isn't the point, that the book is actually an anti-romance novel, that it's actually Edna's downfall, this voluptuous falling in love. Her love affair clouds her mind from this attempt at self-reliance. She does not go to Paris alone. She drowns instead. For some reason it's harder for young women to not be destroyed by love, to disentangle themselves enough in order to take themselves back as subjects, as authors, of their own narrative.

Perhaps Edna in *The Awakening* wouldn't have started to paint, seriously, without her solitude. (What does it mean to paint seriously, to write seriously? It is all about self-identity, and discipline, this audacity to believe that what one could possibly create is worth sharing with the world.) In Chopin's novel, Edna begins to see herself as both a sovereign person and an artist because her husband has left the vacation island to go to work. So she spends the summer in unusual circumstances, alone and with a community of women (as well as with Robert, her eventual lover).

So many of these modern women became artists in isolated settings. They did this to rally against the existential crisis that a traditional marriage can be — the man allowed to go out into the world and transcend himself, the woman reduced to the kind of work that will be erased and forgotten at day's end, living invisible among the vestigial people of the afternoon.

The Bovaries trapped in the provinces, desiring to radicalize. Zelda taking ballet lessons while in Delaware.

While stuck in Kentucky the Baroness begins to write the story of her life. Like Scott with Zelda, her husband belittled her efforts, probably as manipulation, the fear of no longer having her and her words as raw material.

Then there's the other type of solitude, which Edna experiences in the second half of *The Awakening*, set in New Orleans — finally alone walking around a city, experiencing an endless stimulation. There is something about the experience of being thrust into the world, alone, not as a pair, having surprising encounters.

Viv who began writing stories while strolling around Paris, there was a fear, yes, a terror of being alone, but also this heightened consciousness, a starting to work through who she was as a subject propelled into the world.

In Paris Zelda stimulated by all the art she sees, the salons.

Jane limping elegantly through the streets of Paris, carrying under her arm *Le Deuxième Sexe*. She spent the majority of this second stage of their honeymoon alone.

The Bowles journeyed to Panama on a freighter for the beginning of their honeymoon. They didn't travel light. "With them they had two wardrobe trunks, twenty-seven suitcases, a typewriter, and a record player."

Despite all of her phobias and aversions, especially linked to travel, Jane Bowles chose to marry an adventurer who had a decided affinity for the non-Western, the lesser traveled the better, all Hemingway and heart of darkness. But yet on these journeys, through northern Africa, central America, he expected her to snap out of her nervous, jangly self. He refused to cosset her. She needed to control

her phobias, her nerves.

And yet Jane always pushed herself into experiences that terrified her. Infiltrating herself into the community of women who ran the grain markets in Tangiers. In Guatemala City she convinced a group of students to take her to a brothel, where the chief bodyguard of the dictator wanted Jane (she escaped through a window).

Her novel *Two Serious Ladies* is a quest narrative of two society girl-women, Mrs. Copperfield and Miss Goering, both hilariously socially ill-adept, both intense, interrogating, wanting to understand motives and desire. Both wealthy women terribly alone (one in her big house, the other in her marriage) who allow themselves to be fleeced for companionship — they are terrified of being alone, but also force themselves into situations where they feel terror.

Both *The Sheltering Sky* and *Two Serious Ladies* are companion texts of a marriage — how the Bowles each characterized the adventurous in their literary depictions of their marriage — the husband is searching always for the infinite, for a traveler's authenticity, while the wife is also looking for a level of experience, of adventure, but it is in the ecstasy of abjection, of slumming.

It's difficult to describe the strange ecstasy of Jane's novel, the strangeness of the encounters, the ludicrous situations Bowles puts her characters in, and really, they throw themselves into, as a test, as penance, as a desire to unravel. Her characters are like Carole Lombard in *My Man Godfrey*, yet with an absurdist streak, all wide-eyed innocence and jumpiness and reversals, clumsy, stilted bodies punctuating dialogue. Everyone reacts to each other in a syncopated violence, that then quickly becomes lethargic. And the ladies feel an intense tenderness towards all of the orphaned characters they meet. Characters fall in love with each other and attach themselves to each other instantly, vampirically.

In *Two Serious Ladies* Mrs. Copperfield is terrified to go to Panama with her husband. Mr. Copperfield is portrayed as a pedantic doofus, always pouting when Mrs. Copperfield refuses to accompany him. In the novel Jane depicts the more traditional wife now free to explore her own self, to search for a *jouissance* of the streets. (Why couldn't Scott have reacted as Paul did when he read — and edited, and helped steward — the work? You've made me kind of an idiot, he said to her. She grinned. That was all.)

Zelda's *Save Me the Waltz* is an existential novel about a wife attempting to become an artist, like Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. In *Waltz* Alabama begins to dance to come into consciousness. In Paris, Zelda immerses herself in ballet study with Madame Egorova, attempting to contort and discipline her body into that of a great

ballerina. Her wonderful and sadistic portrait of the dancers in the novel.

As the narrative has been written, it was Zelda's obsession with dance, which takes her away from all her duties and parties, that catalyzed her first breakdown and subsequent internment in the Swiss asylum. She jumped out of a cab because she was so worried she was going to be late for rehearsal. In Scott's ledger of that day, the language he will later use to philosophize himself: THE CRACK.

And so, Zelda was sent to Switzerland, wrapped up like a baby and held and urged against this new chosen life of the artist. She spent over a year in an asylum at Lake Geneva, where she was forcibly restrained and medicated. Her efforts to be an artist were seen as part of her "obsessional illness." Dr. Forel, her doctor, diagnosed her as schizophrenic, a term coined by Eugen Bleuler, who observed her for an hour to confirm the diagnosis. (In turn, Zelda named Bleuler an "imbecile.")

This is the narrative written about Zelda. It's never disputed: this diagnostic label, schizophrenic. Or if it's disputed, it's seen as something else (she was bipolar, or BPD, not schizophrenic) with no awareness of these diagnostic labels as discursive categories.

Zelda Fitzgerald suffered from schizophrenia.

Zelda Fitzgerald was a schizophrenic.

In her review of Nancy Milford's rather old-fashioned biography, Hardwick also doesn't look critically at Zelda's diagnosis, and instead attributes most of her fall to her diagnosed mental illness. She writes, "In her, alas, the madness was real rather than indulgence" (as opposed to, I would imagine, the indulged madness of Scott's crack-up or Eliot's fragmentation). This is the fiction behind our medical model of mental illness — that a diagnosis by a doctor (by one doctor, several doctors) somehow makes it *real*, when it is instead rhetoric constructed and corroborated by authorities who have much at stake in the terms that they themselves have invented.

It's almost impossible not to psychologize Hardwick, the critic, as she psychologized her subjects, treating her as a character somehow in this drama, as she's writing these essays while her husband has abandoned her. She doesn't explicitly insert herself within, but she's there, everywhere, in the essays. At times she seems to parallel Zelda and her string of institutions with that of Lowell's (how the mad "entwine their relations"), seeing Scott as the long-suffering husband of the mad person like she was, she does this too in her essay on Sylvia, these essays in a way are the sane other half's meditation on the vampirism of madness.

Yet part of Bleuler's theories of schizophrenia ties into all the 19th century ideas of moral insanity — that Zelda's "illness" was due

in part to feelings of inferiority and an "incipient egomania." (How can one be an artist without this ego?) In order to have a "normal marriage" Zelda needed to give up her "inflated ambitions" and engage in "activities appropriate to her talents and tastes." This the doctors prescribed, her husband all along urging them on. The methods of shame and manipulation of the father-confessors, who then in turn are granted the authority to control and tell her narrative. HE DO THE POLICE IN DIFFERENT VOICES.

In Dr. Forel's "reeducation program," Zelda was trained again to be a good mother and a good wife (along with various forms of shock therapy, which realigned behavior, made for more tractable female patients). When she was released from the Swiss asylum her case was summarized as "reactions to her feelings of inferiority (primarily toward her husband)…" and ambitions that were "self-deceptions" which "caused difficulties between the couple."

While in Switzerland, Scott urged Madame Egorova to write a letter deflating Zelda's ambitions. Instead, the former dancer for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes wrote a letter saying that Zelda began too late to ever be a truly great dancer, but could hope someday to be a member of a company (Zelda was still crushed by this). It was around this time that Zelda received the offer to dance in Italy.

In *Save Me the Waltz* Zelda shows Alabama triumphing, if only temporarily — she goes and takes the solo role, goes and lives on her own in Italy, away from her role as wife and mother, this is a reversal of what happened in Zelda's life. What a fascinating decision Zelda makes to have her character live her dream in her novel, only to come crashing down to reality, to containment and hospitalization (in the novel she must give up her dancing because she has severely injured her foot, although obviously Zelda is drawing from her asylum experiences, the new career of mental patient that aborted her dance ambitions). It would be so much more of an authentic, lived-in text if Zelda had been allowed to tell her own story, instead of being censored by her husband, the narrative that we know partly from *Tender* and partly from the biographies. Yet the work ends brilliantly, the death of the father, the return to "normal"—consciousness, Alabama decides, "is an ultimate betrayal I suppose," which mirrors Edna Pontellier's awakening, the sense of realizing that the traditional wife is not as free within society as she perhaps thought. The work concludes with a showing of the husband David's triumphant ballet paintings, a coopting of the woman's suffering that mirrors real-life, the man viewed as the artist. Zelda depicts a shuttering return to the surface after the plunge down below at the end, the chattering society parrots, spouting nonsense witticisms.

The endings of Victorian literary texts authored by women (*The*

Awakening, "The Yellow Wallpaper") mirror the endings of these women's lives — they were shuttled into suicide or madness, both painful, horrible ways out, which also removes their subjectivity so intensely fought over. This madness or suicide becomes a form of communication denied to them.

My students who were always enthralled by suicide. They wanted to know all the dirty details. Virginia with rocks in her pockets. Sylvia with her head in the oven. They shiver, they tsk, but with curious glee. With the children in the next room? The end of *The Awakening*: But what about the children? Edna, think about the children. This overdetermines their reading.

Yet how we memorialize, memorize, these women, their last days. The anniversary of Sylvia's death is celebrated annually online within this female blogging subsubculture. The writer Bhanu Kapil and I when meeting for the first time in real life at a conference communing about the physicality of Virginia Woolf as she is in the water, her body. I tell her then about Unica Zürn's body laid out after jumping from the balcony of Hans Bellmer's sixth-floor Paris apartment, he had just dumped her after his stroke, which also mimics the movement of the little girl's suicide fantasy in her novel *Dark Spring*, the tiny body in the grass, which strangely mirrors the aesthetic of Bellmer's dolls: "a wish to conserve the tragic and precise trace of a falling naked body, from the window on the sidewalk, as a strange object." We choreograph these movements, we graft them onto our own body.

On our blogs we share references, figures. I know these women know, bodily, Woolf 's last letter to her husband. Or Edna walking into the sea. I don't think this is just some fanatic adoration or uninformed romanticism by some grown-up goth girls who later became poets and fiction writers — I think there's recognition embedded in this, the realization of these women's struggles in their material lives to even make the work, and a decision to memorialize how this struggle ended, as opposed to erasing or demonizing this last act, and prevent it from completely writing over the life or the work.

How could Zelda have escaped her institutionalization? She could have left and moved to Italy — but how would that have been possible? She could have escaped perhaps if she fought against the very way that she was being defined — but the life of a psychiatric patient is to be systematically dehumanized and then made over, rewritten — one learns to acquiesce in order to get out, to survive. Even if women in traditional roles in this era could rebel against their schooled selves, trained to experience shame and guilt for going outside of bounds, like Zelda arguably did, for a time, they couldn't escape society, in the form of their husband, the doctors, their mothers. They couldn't escape judgment and discipline.

A woman was not allowed to be moody or silent or sullen. Or to abandon the keeping of the house, the keeping of the husband. T.S. Eliot could face the immense disapproval of his parents when he ditched his dissertation at Harvard and set about to be a Great Poet. Yet these were not dreams most women, especially in traditional roles, could often voice out loud.

In *The Awakening*, both the husband and doctor alarmed at Edna's pale peakedness, her excitable state, after spending a whole day painting, choosing to be alone and with her work as opposed to obeying social rituals like house calls. In women, this is seen as a sign of illness.

I do not challenge the idea that there was a feverish tinge to Zelda's practice, bordering on obsession. I'm not arguing that she wasn't in some form of distress, that she didn't have some mental health stuff going on. But I think we choose to call it pathological. Don't we also romanticize this sort of obsession in the history of art and literature?

In Flaubert's house, servants and everyone in the household tiptoed around him in the AM while he worked, until he rang the bell, his cursory unspoken cue, a servant would run up and hand him a glass of water, which he'd drink, and a newspaper, which he scanned. Then he'd pound on the wall, his mother would come and sit and converse with him, a happy helpmate, lunch, a long leisurely walk, then the Work, met with trembling and awe by the others, evenings of society and reading out loud to his writer-friends, the occasional excursions to Paris to fuck his mistress. This is before he ever published a thing. Except something in a local paper. He was milked and fed and cultivated and allowed. He was encouraged, and enabled, to *become* Flaubert. Same with Tom. He was allowed to write "The Waste Land." Waited on hand and foot by Vivie once at home. His nerves tended to, his absolute exhaustion treated. (She nursed him through several collapses, when she collapsed he would perennially send her away.) Although he did work constantly, too much, everything was spiritually in the service of his eventual great art, the Bel Esprit, Ezra Pound's monetary campaign to allow him to be a writer. Save the Poet. And lines built upon lines. That is how one writes. Slowness. Wait. And in the isolation of that room, a belief in oneself that could be construed as monstrous. In one's own Eventual Greatness. No little voices that wormed through to whisper in one's ear: Sick Sick Sick. What is seen as signs of great Artistry in a man can be seen as alarm in a woman's behavior. So besides the isolation of the room that all writers and artists suffer under, there is an active campaign against women to pathologize their struggle, their torment, or to have this done for them. (The narrator in "The Yellow

Wallpaper" feeling she wouldn't feel so nervous and fatigued, if she didn't always have to struggle against the husband, the good sister-in-law, society, if she was given permission to be, to not have to hide her writing.)

There's this idea in the Fitzgerald legend that Zelda VOMITED out *Waltz*, unlike Scott's painstaking refinement of *Tender*. She is read as an outsider writer (so really mad, not just operating in that world of romanticized madness). Her writing characterized by obsession, by excess, by mental illness. There is another Zelda character in *Tender*, the 30-year-old American painter at the Swiss clinic, a scaled she-monster, body burning with eczema. Of this artist Scott writes: "She was coherent, even brilliant, within the limits of her special hallucinations."

Yet Henry Miller can write his brilliant, associative, song of himself, unfettered, read as great literature. The Beats are allowed their benzedrine.

The female mode of possession is read as Sylvia's blood jet — such a feminine image, the menstrual blood spewing, the cut of the wrists. The burst of creativity, the obsessive drive, will always be read as unmedicated, disordered, dangerous.

In *Waltz* Alabama's dancing is depicted as a sort of mysticism, which David (standing in for Scott) both jealously fetishizes and then scorns. While blocked in the process of writing *Tender*, Scott resented his wife's productivity. She remembers, in a letter: "I worked constantly and was terribly superstitious and moody about my work… I lived in a quiet, ghostly, hypersensitized world of my own. Scott drank." With the aid of her doctors he pathologized Zelda's artmaking, removing any subjectivity or raised consciousness in her breakdown. In his characterizations of her to her doctors and in his fictional portrayals, he provides his defense, an argument against the possibility of the woman artist. Again, from *Tender*, the doctor decides the woman's case: "The frontiers that artists must explore were not for her, ever. She was fine-spun, inbred — eventually she might rest in some quiet mysticism." And yet I think this period of intense artmaking for Zelda was filled with absolute lucidity. Yet this is not how she's been mythologized or remembered. "You were going crazy and calling it genius." Scott said to her.

The self-immolating woman writer. Zelda's body enflamed with eczema. She died in a fire at the asylum. Like her Joan of Arc. Ingeborg Bachmann burning in her bed. The left side of Clarice Lispector burned while smoking in bed. FEAR DEATH BY FIRE. Zelda was possessed, but this is viewed as making her mad, unlike the men, unlike FLOW-bert. The blood jet is dangerous, a woman's flow is dangerous. Buried within how Zelda was disciplined are these

Victorian ideas of mental illness, that women shouldn't overstrain themselves, that a woman was somehow too fragile to be an artist, Virginia kept down to an hour a day, Zelda kept down to two.

If Zelda shut herself away to work, it was considered a sign of her illness, the diagnosis that is always also a sort of confinement, for a woman, a subaltern, whereas if Scott does it it's the model of the artist, in the tradition of Nietzsche or Flaubert. Deleuze's notion of the "crack" taken from Fitzgerald's essay, cracking up as slipping below the slippery surface — Henry Miller's fucking, Artaud's madness, Fitzgerald's alcoholism — these are the writers who got to wonderland, but what about the women who were possessed? What about Jean Rhys writing *Good Morning, Midnight* in a year, drinking intensely, she wrote in bed, in the mornings, the bed littered with pages. At times tearing up her book, her contract. She too was perhaps near the CRACK. I'm not trying to argue exclusively for the romanticized model of the self-destructive writer, but to point out how they are remembered differently, the male genius versus the female dilettante or crazy chick, the hierarchical divide, one through mythology, the other a demonology.

It's telling that Nancy Milford labels a third of her biography on Zelda "Breakdown," beginning with Zelda's immersion in dancing which has been read historically as pathological obsession, culminating in her first hospitalization. And yet, breakdown can also be breakthrough, as R.D. Laing has said. Perhaps all of life is a breaking down, as Scott Fitzgerald writes in the beginning of his "Crack-Up" essay, but there can be discovery in that process. Edna in *The Awakening* breaks down as well — yet she is so close to breaking through, to absolute selfdom, but she retreats.

That first photograph of Zelda taken after the asylum — in the sailor suit, she has scrawled the words "Cured!" across the bottom. This is the first time Zelda looks ugly. I think of this as her hag photo, she is serious, weary/wary, the pose of the artist. Cured! Cured perhaps from being the object, no longer being the young girl. For the hag is the writer. When she is expelled or violently expels herself from being considered a young lovely object (through age, illness, or madness).

Unica Zürn before the smiling, golden girl, an eerie resemblance to Sylvia Plath, yet later on the cover of her work of haunting and unraveling, *The Man of Jasmine*, the straggly unkempt, brunette hair, the intense, focused gaze.

The figure of the hag and the angel that haunts these modern women. Edna Pontellier doesn't want to become either of her close female intimates, either the pianist Mademoiselle Reisz, who has thrown off all pretensions to femininity, or her friend Madame

Ratignolle, the perfect mother. Just as Esther Greenwood in *The Bell Jar* imagines she must choose as models of her fate either her ugly female editor or the June Cleaverness of her mother. Just as Adrienne Rich so disturbed Elizabeth Hardwick, "she deliberately made herself ugly." Cured!

The specter of the "ugly" feminist that still haunts us. For I still don't want to be an ugly woman and when I write I am an ugly woman, I am rude and crabby, I am braless, my breasts knocking up against each other, I don't wear deodorant or make-up, don't leave the house for days, I forget what it's like to be outside, a body, a body lumpy from lack of exercise and a hasty daily diet.

But Flaubert got all syphilitic from fucking the prostitutes and bath boys in Egypt, he became a gross old man so quickly as he was writing *Bovary*, long-haired and balding and potbellied, like Robert Lowell who went from being movie-star handsome to a sort of goatish professor-type. Or God how about Ford Madox Ford! I shudder to think of that wheezing walrus pressed up against Jean Rhys' petite, perfumed frame. These men lost their looks or never had them and it never once stopped them from writing. I'm sure Paul Bowles never looked at his ass and worried that he looked like a stuffed sausage in his skinny jeans. I'm sure F. Scott Fitzgerald never spent hours worrying over his receding hairline in the mirror (and yet they could also write in a mirror, because they were never dismissed as simply doing that).

An intense writing period sometimes like some unending final exam week. (What is the difference between depression and being immersed within a project? For don't you sometimes have to be the Before woman in the antidepressant ad, alone in the dark, struggling, before coming out on the other side?)

It drives me absolutely bonkers that the mythology of Zelda, as endlessly repeated by Scott's biographers, by even her biographer, by her daughter, dictates some narrative that she was not disciplined enough, and that is why she did not succeed as an artist. She was absolutely disciplined. My god, she twisted and contorted herself into a dancer within years. She made paintings for decades that she only showed in a gallery setting a few times. She worked steadily on her stories, and then later graduated to novels. Or the other line goes, well, she didn't pick just writing or just one art form, so she was all over the place (as if famous writers didn't and don't practice other art forms).

Zelda did not succeed as a writer because she was brainwashed into believing that she was ill and that her art came out of her illness, not her brilliance, so much so that she really became ill. In the course

of her treatment and her war with her husband over her right to take herself back as her own material she was systematically broken and dehumanized, and her tools were taken away from her, and most importantly, her nerve.

It is this crucial period in Zelda's life — the breakdown in which she still continued to create — that was the point of intense controversy and disagreement between the couple. She continued to paint and write stories while Scott worked on the "madness material," laboring drunk and blocked over *Tender* for 7 years. He would read it out loud to her, he would attempt to pick her brain for her memories, her eczema inevitably returned, as it did when he was around, and she insisted on being hospitalized in Baltimore (most likely as a way to get away from him).

The story of Zelda's attempts to write *Waltz* can be read as a cautionary tale of the muse who takes herself, her breakdown, as her own material. For *Waltz* is not only about Alabama attempting to become a dancer, but also Zelda, through writing the work, trying to become a writer, to take back herself from being a character.

Elizabeth Hardwick once spoke of the twin impulses to write — desperation or revenge. Zelda started to write stories once she saw her husband use her letters and journals in his own novels. Also for the desire to have her own identity outside of her marriage, outside of her husband's fictions. Fitzgerald who once said, presciently—"Sometimes I don't know if Zelda and I are real or whether we're characters in one of my novels." One of his novels — not hers.

When she was a young girl it was okay to live as opposed to write — to allow others to take her as their muse.

F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. She is no one without him. She is subsumed under his name. He is the author, she a collaborating muse, a "complementary intelligence." This was all fine until she wanted to be her own author.

When she was institutionalized at the Phipps Clinic in Baltimore, *Save Me the Waltz* comes out of her in six weeks — about the dancing, about the breakdown — the earlier institutions didn't want Zelda to write or dance or paint, thinking it would be too much of a strain, but the Baltimore clinic allowed her a few hours every day, and she made the most of that time. She sends the manuscript to Fitzgerald's editor at Scribner's without showing Scott first. And Scott goes absolutely bananas, launching in earnest an accelerating campaign to silence Zelda and block her literary efforts, a campaign in which Scott enlisted her doctors and his editor and all of his heft as a literary heavyweight to disenfranchise her nascent career as a writer. He insisted on, and got huge cuts from the manuscript, including all material dealing with psychiatry. (All of these letters demanding cuts,

as well as the original manuscript and Zelda's draft revisions have been "mislaid.") Zelda fought against this, fought against him, but she was totally overpowered. From a letter she sent from the Baltimore clinic:

However, I would like you to thoroughly understand that my revision will be made on an aesthetic basis: that the other material which I will elect is nevertheless legitimate stuff which has cost me a pretty emotional penny to amass and which I intend to use when I can get the tranquility of spirit necessary to write the story of myself versus myself. That is the book I really want to write.

Yes, it was legitimate, but she was illegitimate. Her husband was considered the real writer, and he won. After she is released from the clinic and back at the house in Delaware, she continues to write. They quarrel constantly over her refusal to show him what she's working on. His main fear is that she would write about psychiatry before *Tender* came out. She had begun a new novel, also about her asylum experiences, albeit fictionalized, a work that morphed into being about the dancer Nijinsky's madness. She locked herself in her room to work on her asylum novel, and locked up her manuscript after each day's work. All along Scott is in his smoke-filled study and old robe, clutching his gin bottles, them screaming at each other, making up, screaming.

Then the final confrontation that effectually aborted Zelda's career as a writer, before it ever began. A stenographer and doctor needed to be present, a 114 page transcript of this conversation which reads like some A&E reality show. It is brutal to read, the complete demolishing of a woman writer, bringing in both medical and literary authorities. Throughout Zelda is completely sane, logical, Scott is ranting, totally mad, paranoid, obliterating. Yet insisting that it is he who is being destroyed.

Scott: "Her theory is that anything is possible, and that a girl has just got to get along, and so she has the right, therefore to destroy me completely in order to satisfy herself."

Zelda: "Dr. Rennie, that is completely unfair and it is not my theory. And I have never done anything against you, I have absolutely nothing to reproach myself with. And as far as destroying you is concerned I have considered you first in everything I tried to do in my life."

The doctor as go-between tells Zelda that if she could not write "masterpieces," like her husband, then her "ambitions" to write would only further "depress" her. "I will always be unhappy then," she said. "I was a good deal more unhappy when I did not want to write." She finally agrees to what the doctor prescribes in his own words as "a complete abnegation of yourself" (an obliterature). She is forbidden

from writing fiction that draws on a shared biography (in other words, her own life):

"I want you to stop writing fiction…Whether you write or not does not seem to be of any great importance."

"I know, nothing I do seems to be of any great importance."

"Why don't you drop it then?"

"Because I don't want to live with you. Because I want to live some place that I can be my own self."

Zelda begs to be put away again. Scott tells her that that can't happen, as he doesn't believe she's actually "insane." It is ultimately decided that until he is done with *Tender* she cannot write any more about psychiatry. Scott tells Zelda—"If you write a play, it cannot be a play about psychiatry, and it cannot be a play laid on the Riviera, and it cannot be a play laid in Switzerland; and whatever the idea is, it will have to be submitted to me." He ends with: "I am the professional novelist, and I am supporting you. That is all my material. None of it is your material."

Their marriage, his material, a communal banquet only he can draw from. She cannot say: I have begun writing seriously. He wanted her to exist in this way, as a "complementary intelligence," he says. Her role is to be the Athena-muse who comes out of his head as if he has invented her. That was her role, a role she transgressed when she began to draw upon their common stock of material — not only the letters and diaries, but the raw material, her life.

The suppression of one's first person in a literary marriage. Zelda's use of the first person to state her case that she should be allowed to write of her own experience was a major point of contention during the Fitzgeralds's numerous and escalating fights. He would yell at her — Who is this "I"? Scott also scratched out the first person in her articles. We know that she almost never got her own byline, and the ideology behind that, of course, was that she was never her own author.

SUPPRESS EVERYTHING SUPPRESSIBLE

In her essay on Zelda, Elizabeth Hardwick doesn't find it particularly troubling that her letters and diaries are plagiarized, that the articles and stories are wrongly attributed. (But Zelda did, she who scrawled out Scott's name on a story's byline and wrote "No" and "Me.")

This is astonishing to me, considering Hardwick's words vampirized by her ex-husband in *The Dolphin*, and her essays in the same collection that are in a way a tacit act of revenge. Also considering that Hardwick never wrote first person during her entire marriage to Robert Lowell — her only first-person books, the novels,

were written before and after his death.

Yet to Hardwick, the literary wife exists in collaboration, albeit an invisible one. Louise Colet, Vivien(ne) Eliot, and Zelda operating as midwives for these great texts — Zelda who drew the face of Gatsby over and over until Scott could see it, who copy-edited his work for him, who helped jog his memory over events and characters. She listened to his drafts at any hour of the evening. Henry Miller wanted Anaïs to be like Frieda Lawrence, first reader and helpmate. Hardwick writes:

Many writers seem to long for these trembling, gifted, outstanding hand-maidens, for they are aware that the prosaic, the withdrawn, the demanding, are terrible daily deterrents to art and that the presence of an intelligent, sympathetic, clever sensibility, always at hand, always bright and somehow creative is a source, even a source of material.

At times in the essay, Hardwick seems to sympathize with Zelda, especially her desire for sovereignty, and is certainly sympathetic to the manipulation and policing of Zelda by Scott and the doctors once she began to attempt a novel about her own experiences. However, she ultimately sides with the male genius, who has already proven his worth, as opposed to the less talented — in this case less experienced — writer. For what is genius but experience? Shakespeare's Sister not given the time or luxury or permission to *become* Shakespeare. Scott writing to his daughter, Scottie, that maybe Zelda would have been a genius if they had never met. What does that mean? Perhaps that she would have been allowed to have become a genius, if she wasn't swallowed whole by the great white whale of his literature. If she wasn't suppressed by the husband-patriarch.

Critics often grant that *This Side of Paradise* and *The Beautiful and Damned* are flawed, juvenile work with promises of brilliance, all while the very same critics are likely to dismiss Zelda's novel and the stories as a sign that she does not equal the later refinement and maturity of her husband's apparent masterpieces. Why was Zelda not allowed to have a first, flawed yet brilliant novel?

In a way Hardwick's essay reads as an elaborate defense of the supreme rights of the (male) artist. That, yes, perhaps Zelda is the victim, but also the necessary sacrifice. There can be, she writes, only one, overwhelming personality, only one, overwhelming genius, in a literary marriage. The brilliant works to her are Scott's novels and stories — this to her is the textual phoenix, miraculous amidst such mutual debilitation (what constitutes WORKS for Hardwick, not letters or journals: anything that cannot be stolen or appropriated. This is all caught up in what Foucault calls the "author-function," when one is considered an author, everything is the work, when one is not, it lacks

legitimacy).

I wonder, did Hardwick feel this was the case in her own marriage? That Robert Lowell was the genius, and she was the quick-witted, talented, handmaiden, the necessarily sacrificial wife, who must not attempt to write literature during the marriage? If so, she was wrong. Jean Stafford thankfully knew that was not the case — she won the Pulitzer Prize for her collection of stories, AC of course. Or perhaps Hardwick was just being a pragmatist, a realist, as with her and Mary McCarthy's stance on feminism — there is always a power differential in marriage, someone always wins (but does the Other need to be extinguished?).

Much like the transcript between the feuding Fitzgeralds, however, the denouement of Hardwick's essay on Zelda is an infuriating take on what really constitutes an author in society as opposed to an "amateur" (Fitzgerald's term, which Hardwick borrows). At the end, Hardwick doesn't read Zelda's narrative in the context of her own self creation, but in terms of her husband's, in her culminating thesis on the artistic couple. She writes, "Still, only one of the twins is real as an artist, as a person with a special claim upon the world, upon the indulgence of society." Zelda, Hardwick writes in this disappointingly psychoanalytic reading, is the "half of himself " now thankfully "subdued" in his last, unfinished but still feted work, *The Last Tycoon*. He has now been freed from his excessive self-indulgent side, which she characterizes as the Zelda side.

Ultimately, she writes, for the genius to realize himself, the "amputation" of this appendage is crucial and necessary. A sort of marital Oedipal, he needs to free himself from this twinning by a symbolic murder, or perhaps by making sure she's locked away somewhere, depressingly the movement of much of modernism and beyond, the woman must be sacrificed for the art, the idea of the necessary sacrifice of Wife #1, the Lilith figure. William Burroughs, who killed his wife Joan in a game of William Tell (the apple, Eve, Edenic), said and acknowledged this most plainly when he gave advice to an aspiring novelist: SHOOT THE BITCH AND WRITE A BOOK.

In the artist and sacrifice, who (or what) is sacrificed? She is asked to destroy herself, to sacrifice herself, for his art, an Iphigenia. And yet, when she attempts to progress as an artist, she is accused of being self-destructive, of self-immolating, of throwing herself headfirst into the fire.

The Oedipal-edible: she must devour herself. A war where one needs to be murdered. Besides the obvious discipline and punishment of Zelda, using all of the official channels of patriarchy, her spiritual struggle to overthrow the great author, her husband, also blocked her

from creating herself as an author. Zelda and Viv in the shadow of their husbands' genius in their early writings, which composed the majority if not the entirety of their visible efforts. Viv mimicking a Prufrockian malaise, even being able to channel her husband's voice to write a (deleted) passage of "The Waste Land." When Zelda began writing her stories she read one of her husband's stories every night while he was away in Hollywood writing a screenplay, and even wrote him at first regarding her progress with *Waltz*: "It is distinctly L'École Fitzgerald, yet more ecstatic than yours — perhaps too much so." The blockage that occurred, when she attempted to move initially beyond letter and diary writing to a more traditional narrative as a young girl:

Yesterday I almost wrote a book or a story, I hadn't decided which, but after two pages of my heroine I discovered that I hadn't even started her, and since I couldn't just write forever about a charmingly impossible creature, I began to despair.

She was always measured and read within L'École Fitzgerald, the only school she tutored in. In the collection *The Crack-Up* that Edmund Wilson edited after Fitzgerald's death, a couple of Zelda's pieces are included with his and without her byline. If the work is very good, it is assumed he wrote it. If it's not the height of brilliance, then he at least had a hand in the good parts. That's how it goes with the Fitzgerald mythology. Foucault's author-function, the tyranny and branding of the great author.

What spiritual effect must that have had, to have been a ghost-writer in the Fitzgerald factory?

Jane too felt overshadowed by her significant other's status. Once Paul became an author, writing the novel of their marriage (*Sheltering Sky* as the companion to Jane's *Two Serious Ladies*), and a bestselling author at that, Jane stops writing. "We can't have two writers in the family," she said to him. So much of writing is about declaring that as your identity. Although unlike Scott, Paul acted as the midwife to Jane's work, typing it, editing it. Yet her block lasted decades, and never really ended.

These wives' novels fetal or aborted, Sylvia's revenge fantasy, Jane Bowles' fragments trapped in a series of notebooks begging to be freed. Later after the stroke a mind trapped inside itself. Or delivered too young like Zelda's, published by Scribner's riddled with errors, not to be taken seriously. She is raw material, she is a messy, disordered girl, the worst sort of revenge on Scott's part, as if his prose was delivered immaculately upon the heavens and read with reverence.

And yet once it's out there in the world he must take ownership of it, as if he had produced it and signed it, approved it, through the Fitzgerald factory. He gives an interview to *The Baltimore Sun*. Headline: "He Tells of her Novel." Subtitle: "Work sent to Publisher is

Autobiographical at Suggestion of Husband."

Zelda and Jane also blocked by the violence of being made a madwoman, a spiritual murder. Zelda insisted upon being institutionalized again after reading *Tender* in serial, Jane blocked after reading *The Sheltering Sky*. In Paul Bowles's novel the husband Port, drawn to the infinite, the sovereign, who wants his wife Kit to be an adventurer like him — he prowls nights, streets alone, gets lost, experiments with prostitutes. She is a Madame Bovary hysterical and superstitious, who completely loses her mind at the end, after the death of her husband and after being subject to rapes and beatings. Although in the preface to *The Sheltering Sky*, Paul writes of Kit as his "invented wife," his psychological voodoo must have felt surgical — the character portrait so close to the knife.

She was written as a madwoman and then she became a madwoman. This was her shadow, her sheltering sky. Prophets and prophesies.

In Chicago, I audited a graduate seminar on Fitzgerald at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The class took place in one of those depressing utilitarian buildings designed during the days of student riots, fortresses against revolt, safe safe places. No one can get in. No one can get out.

While lecturing, the tenured male professor regularly raises his hands reverently and tics off his fingers the canon of GREAT AMERICAN WRITERS. A constant MAN-tra — let's see, there's DeLillo, Pynchon, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, of course, who else, Roth, Doctorow, David Foster Wallace. I sit in class and furiously watch his fingers, like little guns. The canon/cannon. Yes, there's a violence to it, to this gesture of exclusion. Like jabbing dismissals. Like Gertrude Stein segregating the male geniuses from their wives who sat at Alice's tea table, tracing the tradition of Great Men from Henry James to herself (I mean, Gertrude Stein was basically a patriarch, right? The patriarch is the one who gets to name).

I take the course in order to apply to English PH.D. programs, but I drop out mid-semester. It just seems there is too much to defend against. I want to write my little outlaw texts and not have to reason with the Professor X's.

I guess I have always had a tremendous fear of being institutionalized.

(She was institutionalized, as Mad Woman, as Bad Wife, and he was institutionalized, as the Great American Author.)

I took this class while I was years-deep in the attempt to become a writer, but I had never actually published any fiction. Stuff like this just destroys my nerves. Strangely, this didn't disappear when I got

published, this sense of illegitimacy and invisibility. Maybe it even got worse, because before I allowed myself to be cocooned in my little world with my dinner party of imaginary friends, the mad wives. Some sort of sanctum.

Do you know that massive novel displayed everywhere lately in bookstores, the one that could serve as a blunt murder weapon? The author is a guy I once knew in Chicago, was friends with for a while. Before he went to a high-profile MFA program we would see each other in the mornings at the coffeeshop I lived above in Wicker Park, him tapping away at his laptop, as I was stumbling home from something, the late-night shift or a boy's bed, wanting to have a cup of coffee and a cigarette and a bagel and write in my journal, and we encouraged each other as beginning writers. I read the story he submitted for his MFA program. A few years later, we had a falling out after a brief and stupid hook-up, I felt he fucked around with me at a particularly vulnerable time in my life, as my mother was dying of cancer while being stuck up in a mental ward, being administered anti-psychotics because she was too fucking depressed about dying of cancer.

After that I always kind of hated him, but prided myself that of the two of us I had actually become the *real* writer (whatever that means). Before we moved to Ohio, I saw him again at this coffee-shop we both frequented once the other one closed down. I hadn't seen him in some time. Quite unlike myself I then found myself bragging to him that I had my first novel coming out. So do I he says. He tells me *his* is a ONE THOUSAND PAGE novel. *Mine* is a slim nervous novella, a grotesque homage to *Mrs. Dalloway*, and an exorcism of my toxic-girl past, published by an experimental feminist press.

He tells me his work will be the longest first-person novel EVER. We discuss the respective length of *Tristram Shandy, Ulysses, Infinite Jest, War and Peace*, etc. He is pulling out his cock and comparing it with those writers with whom he will be compared. (I will be compared to nobody, I think, I am sent into an existential crisis when I get home, and for weeks afterwards.)

Canon actually comes from a Greek word for "measuring rod."

Me stewing internally, outwardly smiling, supportive. Wow I say. Wow. He chatters on about $ and rights and paper v. hardback. He tells me I shouldn't do a reading unless I get paid. Universities are goldmines, he says.

Later when I go home I grow angrier and angrier. And I think: Of the two of us only one of us can be called an artist. He would be viewed as the artist. I, the scribbling sister. I will be called solipsistic. But a thousand-page first-person narrative is not solipsistic?

He writes, I imagine, in the tradition of neurotic men who treat women as objects but are forgiven for their insight and sensitivity, in the tradition of falling in love and into beautiful girls. The entire history of Western literature is dominated by absolute pricks, I realize, pricks that can't get hard but yet ejaculate with such eloquent language, Beckett was a prick with Lucia Joyce (poor Lucia), Scott Fitzgerald was a prick and how does *she* get revenge? She is always the minor writer.

I think of the tremendous EGO required to write all of that first person, and I think this is tied to this notion of legitimacy. Fitzgerald was also such a tremendous egotist. "I really believe that no one else could have written so searchingly the story of the youth of our generation," he writes in one of his "Crack-Up" essays.

He places himself in an ancestral line — he is placed, when he is reviewed, within this significant ancestry. She is illegitimate, kept out from that tradition. In reviews the boy with the massive book is lauded as the next David Foster Wallace, compared to all the other system novelists with their doorstopper novels. He is reviewed as such, awarded, feted — an endless campaign. As I write this he has just won a big award.

The notion of the Great American Novel seems to be almost exclusively male. It seemed for a while *The New York Times* was under the impression that David Foster Wallace's posthumously published, unfinished *The Pale King* was the only recently published novel — it was constantly covered and reviewed, an endless documentation. A canonization — with that book he was raised to the literary heavens. In reviews David Foster Wallace was compared to Melville and other Great Men just like that boy I knew was compared to David Foster Wallace. Much has been said lately about how women are reviewed less in the big literary sections, but not about HOW they are reviewed, or HOW they are not reviewed, and who women writers are or are not compared to in the body of their occasional reviews. We are considered outside the conversation of Great Books, a male-dominated tradition. Not only the self-mythologizing of a Fitzgerald or Miller, singing the Song of Himself for pages upon pages, but an endless mythology from the outside as well, from the Harold Bloom's and Professor X's and James Wood's and men at the head of the major book sections who see in these novels a mirror of their own experience.

During all of the *Pale King* reviews, there were zero copies of my book available online, at Amazon or Small Press Distribution, because the publisher of my first novel, a brilliant feminist writer, isn't exactly interested in the business side of things. I Google myself regularly, checking status, reviews, any sign in the world that my slim work

existed (that I, by extension, existed).

Such a parodox — this kingmaking campaign, all while we are struggling with illegitimacy. All while we are trying to get our little texts published.

I wonder if a reason I feel such a communion with Zelda is because her career mirrors mine as a small-press writer. *Save Me the Waltz* was printed on cheap paper and bound in green linen with a print run of 3,000 copies, which is still more than the run of most small press books today, which usually print 1,000 copies and sometimes much less. Hers sold 1,392 copies, and she earned $120.73. I too am viewed by the outside world as an amateur not a professional, because I make very little money off of my writing, because my books are not available in the (disappearing) megastores. So many of us small-press writers are viewed as failures, especially by our families.

The girl perhaps is the amateur.

I remember my mother taking me to lunch at Marshall Field's, when I am out of college and waiting tables, convinced that I was going to be a writer, even though I hadn't yet written anything. She wanted me to get a real job. I remember her telling me that if I cannot claim it on my taxes writing is a hobby. Yet later on, she was so supportive, so convinced, that I could write, although her idea of writing novels was still connected to the world of Jonathan Franzen and Oprah's couch, as it is for most: Franzen not Fitzgerald the new model of the successful writer, who can claim being a writer on his tax forms, who pumps out an accessible, bourgeois, recognizable world.

The distinction between amateur and professional, between major and minor, so tied to capitalism, who is published by the big houses. In a way Fitzgerald fucked everything up by connecting wealth to great writing. "I am the highest-paid short story writer in the world," he bragged. I am often stricken with these feelings of inferiority (Zelda diagnosed with feelings of inferiority towards her husband), the strange alienation and invisibility of a small-press writer, where you are a name in a very small world, yet elsewhere you are absolutely nobody. And there is still this sense in our culture of writing as connected to fame, and that when one does make it big, get the BIG BOOK, the agent, the press, the publicity, blah blah, that it is deserved. That if one is really good enough — one will get discovered. Whatever that means.

But how does all this affect how I view myself as a "writer"—how society views me? We are weighted down in society by the expectation of capital, an advance or salary proves our worth and value. And what effect can that have on one's own sense of self-esteem — the sense of invisibility coupled with an always desirous need for

recognition — which mirrors Zelda's plight of being labeled an amateur, married not only to an economic success, but also to the Novelist Of His Generation?

I think of the absolute conviction of a writer like Fitzgerald, who felt certain that he was going to belong someday in that tradition, his inflated sense of importance that helped serve him through years of anonymity and rejection when he was still unpublished. Scott papering his wall in his New York apartment with all of his rejections —122 for 19 stories! — they were the fuel that fed him. The drive was always not only fame but immortality. Fitzgerald seemed always aware that his story would be told by biographers. He reacted to rejection with a fuck-you bravado — this is perhaps a masculine impulse, the triumph of the ego. Contrast this with Vivien(ne) who stopped trying to publish entirely when *The Dial* rejected her story — or Zelda, whose esteem for her writing collapsed after the supposed failure of *Save Me the Waltz* (a failure read in reviews written by men and by sales figures).

That pivotal scene in *The Bell Jar* where Esther is riding in the backseat of her mother's station wagon, defeated and small after her ego-crushing adventures in the gloss and lies of Manhattan, watching the telephone poles of the suburbs drift by which remind her of the dread and monotony of an unfree life, and then her mother drops what she doesn't realize is a bomb, that Esther did not gain access to the writing seminar at Harvard that she had pinned all her hopes on for escape that summer. What I've always found so real and poignant about *The Bell Jar* is that her breakdown was catalyzed by a crushing creative rejection. That Esther felt she would never write again.

For the most part, I have become inured to rejection. I experience a small prick, a stab, and get over it. Yet certain rejections still hit me hard. I tend to react to these more major rejections passively, my shoulderblades go in, as if I already expected the blow. Sometimes a particularly dismissive rejection of a manuscript or a bad review will make me scratch out a day, where I indulge in feelings of futility. This is the reaction of the depressive — to take it inward, to swallow these great big feelings of shame and failure, these feelings I have carried around with me ever since I started to write and tried to publish. I think of all the strength it takes to be an artist — Mademoiselle Reisz feeling Edna's shoulderblades to make sure she's strong enough.

There's such a masochism to publishing — we are begging to be loved, to be seen, to be recognized, to be heard. Some of us take rejections of our writing as rejections of our selves. And perhaps we are setting ourselves up, we as women are bred to look for self-identification from the outside world. We are supposed to aim for that sticker of approval. Yet now some of us externalize our rejections by

blogging about them, about how it makes us feel, the viscera and volitility of our emotions.

I think of the marriage counseling sessions between Zelda and Scott as an involved, bloody, wrestling match between the heavyweight male author and the potential woman writer (viewed as ephemeral, lightweight, minor, as opposed to canonical), the professional and the amateur, as Scott himself put it. Zelda who became entrapped when she dared to write the personal.

The transcript externalizing this great debate about what constitutes literature, and who is allowed to write it. In the battle of words and wills between them, absolutely everything is brought to the surface, all the stuff unsaid in the cultural unconscious. The elaborate campaign to undermine her authority and confidence. His methods of shame and manipulation. Scott confirms what she dreaded/suspected: she is not her own author. She is a character. The alchemy of art, that mysterious voodoo, is too much for her. He condescendingly explains to Zelda in a letter: "What one experiences in a work of art is the dark tragic destiny of being an instrument of something uncomprehended, incomprehensible, unknown — you came to the threshold of that discovery + then decided in the face of all logic you would crash the gate."

He wired Scribner's that the novel would "seriously compromise what literary future she may have and cause inconceivable harm in its present form…" What was the real danger here? I think she disturbed what was considered the privilege of the (male) creator — to draw vampirically from another's life and pretend that it's pure fiction. She disturbs this notion of fiction as sacred alchemy, which is in itself largely a fiction. For Scott drew from real life as well — his elaborate chart he entitles "Classification of the Material on Sickness" where he charts Nicole's versus Zelda's case histories for *Tender Is the Night*.

But if Zelda wrote about the same period, if she circled around the French Riv, around the Swiss asylum, and provided her own version, this makes Fitzgerald less of the genius author. Somehow to say This Happened — some sort of crime. One must hide, shade, fictionalize.

Why is this role-playing seen as essential to Great Literature? What is the purpose of literature? (To reveal the human condition, to explore, to agitate, to experience recognition, to escape, to cause intense pleasure or feeling, to make you reconsider your existence, or reconsider language. There are many potential purposes, none of them specific to the experience or the pretense of being entirely manufactured.)

Perhaps SHE is not read as a Hemingway (or a Fitzgerald), these

so-called Great Male American Novelists, because she took her life as her own subject. Inherent in any dismissal of women writers who draw from memoir is a bias against autobiography that comes out of modernism. The self-portrait, as written by a woman, is read as somehow dangerous and indulgent. Some sort of gag order from modernism that even Second-Wave feminist critics, reading Jean Rhys, reading Zelda, reading Anaïs Nin, have internalized — this idea of being self-indulgent, in indulging in the self as contrary to art. Toril Moi writing dismissively in her chapter on women's writing in *Sexual/Textual Politics*, "This kind of narcissistic delving into one's own self," reflecting the dominant idea that it is dangerous for women to write too much in a mirror, to be too full of herself.

I think of this dismissal as girl-on-girl crime, an internalized bias against women being full of self, of writing their true experiences. SHE DO THE POLICE IN DIFFERENT VOICES.

The charge against women writers so often is narcissism. This unconscious bias against women who are full of themselves bleeds into reactions against their literature. That it's somehow cheating to draw from one's OWN life, even if it's with startling insight into the human condition, or more forbidden still, the complex and ambivalent feminine condition. This charge is almost never leveled at male writers.

Their mirrors taken away in the asylum. Their pens taken away. PHOTOGRAPHY, Pound the patriarch scrawled across the lines of marital trauma in "The Waste Land." A prohibition against writing the self. The hysteric can be photographed, she is not supposed to take her own portrait. Ezra with his pen slicing away Tom's hysteria from the poem, making it transcendent, epic, taking away anything that could be searched out, verified. Much the same way Tom would later edit Djuna Barnes's *Night-wood*, taking out all the girl-on-girl. Bad to write the naked, to write the true.

Memoir is a woman writer's forbidden and often avoided continent. The threat perhaps is a woman writing her own narrative, being her own author. We are told continually in the criticism that comes out of modernism that a work of literature must transcend "self-expression." Woolf writes to this in *A Room of One's Own*, writing of Mary Carmichael, her future, fictionalized woman of genius: "The impulse towards autobiography may be spent. She may be beginning to use writing as an art, not as a method of self-expression."

Zelda's alleged crime in writing *Waltz* is in being too autobiographical, taking her own self as her material. Scott glad Zelda revised "a rather flashy and self-justifying 'true confessions' that wasn't worthy of her into an honest piece of work." (Honest, then, if she fictionalizes, but not honest, if she draws too nakedly from her

own narrative.) Zelda's first biographer, Nancy Milford, also plays into these prejudices. Of *Waltz,* she writes, "Her novel was intensely, even naively autobiographical, and as she drew on her own life, so she drew on her life with Scott, for it was her material as well as his."

Why is this "autobiographical impulse" so taboo, seen as anathema to capital-L Literature? Milford goes on to write, "Perhaps that is the larger problem presented by this novel — that because it is so deeply autobiographical, the transmutation of reality into art is incomplete." The audacity of this idea — that somehow Zelda's breakdown, her own material, cannot be drawn from in her own novel.

Why is self-expression, the relentless self-portrait, not a potentially legitimate form of art? Why do we have this notion that to write the autobiographical (especially if you are a woman), even in the context of a novel, is to not write literature? This comes out of Eliot's notion of New Criticism, or Flaubert's earlier theories, that a novel must transcend the self. Yet of course HE can write the autobiographical, but his work is read as aspiring to something greater. The ruins of his self are the ruins of post-war society. SHE is read as simply writing herself, her toxic, messy self, and her self is not seen as legitimate as literature according to the theories their husbands espoused.

Don't let them find the bodies. Take out anything that can be verified or named.

During our Asheville trip we took a trip to the Grove Park Inn, the massive stone mountain resort where Scott convalesced, his version of Eliot's sanitorium, and then brought his wife from the expensive clinic in Baltimore, to seek "treatment" at the less costly Highland Hospital. Scott was perennially wasted while staying there, a total train wreck. To those acquainted with the Fitzgerald myth this is known as his "Crack-Up" period, named for the series of articles he wrote for *Esquire* magazine, drunk and deteriorating, living in a series of local hotels. As legend tells it, he fired off a gun in a failed suicide attempt and after that the hotel insisted he have a full-time nurse with him if he wanted to stay again the next summer. Now of course he has made the hotel a landmark — they book out his two connecting suites to Fitzgerald fanatics. There is a condo development next door called "The Fitzgerald."

We go stand out on the terrace, along with one other girl-boy couple with a camera swung about his neck. I wonder whose idea this excursion was, perhaps when they met she carried with her a copy of *The Beautiful and Damned*, or maybe he always identified with Amory Blaine.

Yet I wonder if other girls also feel such profound ambivalence towards the author. I wonder if they have read his wife. I wonder if they know her story. I wonder if *I* know her story, her true story, and whether that is impossible, now, to ever really grasp, because of the way she was edited and censored. I wonder if they perhaps read Jean Rhys or Jane Bowles.

(I go to the Great Men to get at the wives and mistresses. They are the ghosts in the corner of these memorials, dismissed in a knowing parenthetical.)

Standing out at the terrace, the view of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the interior all wooden, country club. I can almost picture Scott stumbling by, bloated, a mess. "Do you think he drank out of guilt?" John asks. Guilty because he had his wife locked away, the Erinyes following him like the tortured husband in Eliot's play *The Family Reunion*, convinced he shoved his wife overboard. I don't think so, I say. I do think he suffered — acutely. I know he suffered — poetically. "In a real dark night of the soul it is always three o'clock in the morning," he wrote in his 1936 "Crack-Up" essay. Yes they both suffered. They both suffered so tremendously, I realize. He was just allowed to write his.

At the time Fitzgerald published these essays his fellow male genius contemporaries — Hemingway and Dos Passos and the rest — were like, what the fuck are you doing, Scott? This sort of ripped-from-the-heart memoir wasn't considered real writing, the sense that to write of one's feelings, so first person, so direct, wasn't manly. Wasn't manly? Wasn't LITERARY. See also Sartre's discomfort with the "fleshly promiscuity" of Breton's essay "exhibitionism" or with Bataille's emotionalism. Ezra Pound writing PHOTOGRAPHY on Eliot's poem, making him cut away most of the personal parts. A fear of the feminine in writing Eliot himself internalized, distanced himself against, despite "The Waste Land" still being totally amazingly hysterical and emo.

Of course, like Eliot or Robert Lowell's poetry, Fitzgerald's essays are now seen as exemplars of the form.

I often feel so torn about Scott Fitzgerald, because he was able to channel the emotional, the destructed, while also playing patriarch in his life. He wrote his mad letters but Zelda was never allowed to — she was forbidden from writing a novel about psychiatry or madness. She was prohibited from writing her own breakdown: None of this was her material. Viv's illness and madness stories self-censored. Often I think not of the works that have been written, but those that never were.

On that recent ridiculous list of the 75 "Greatest Books Ever Written" that *Esquire* put together (featuring one woman, Flannery

O'Connor), Fitzgerald's *The Crack-Up* made the list. The reason given? "Because Fitzgerald knew Lindsay, Britney and the Olsens better than we do." I get the quippiness of it, but Fitzgerald was not actually writing in his essay about the girl's unraveling. This is crucial.

Despite his essays being really kind of femme, full of so much excess and emotions, Fitzgerald manages within his essays to place himself firmly within the tradition of a Hamlet, as opposed to an Ophelia (and to explain, justify, legitimize his objective correlative). He imagines in the essays his breakdown as one of disillusionment, of "all values." He is only speaking of all the sad young and old men in his essays, even though his wife is institutionalized and experiencing great suffering at the time he is writing this, there is no mention of her. "Now a man can crack in many ways…" The man is in the universal category — she is erased. He alludes in the essay however to a friend (most likely John Bishop) being in an asylum, "unable to endure any contact with his fellow man."

Zelda is not mentioned because Fitzgerald envisions his breakdown like Eliot's in "The Waste Land"—impersonal, universal, philosophical. ("These fragments I have shorn against my ruins.") His collapse is noble, religious, historical, and above all masculine: "It was very distinctly not modern — yet I saw it in others, saw it in a dozen men of honor and industry since the war." Her crisis by contrast is not seen by him as spiritual, as she is not a great man or one with potential, her crisis is personal, petty.

The writers of *Esquire* are dead-wrong. Fitzgerald is not writing for the Britney Spears or Lindsay Lohans or their anonymous counterparts.

The girl is written, she is kept from writing.

She is interrupted.

Virginia Woolf once wrote in a letter to a friend that she wrote *Room* because she "wanted to encourage the young women — they seem to get fearfully depressed." Yet how would an essay collection spiriting on the future women of potential literary genius serve as a balm, or a bandage, or a mirror, for the young women of Woolf 's time? How does their depression connect to the lack of a literary tradition, the lack of being able to imagine themselves as authors?

The girl in my creative nonfiction workshop in Cleveland. A stress cadet. One of those students who take up a lot of energy during class, who are always ardently holding up a hand. But she also obviously had the gift of lyricism, and had the desire, the burn. However, in her autobiographical pieces she presented to workshop, I felt that she was holding something back, not releasing the real thing underneath. One time I spoke sternly to her during workshop, about a piece of writing

she was supposed to really work on but didn't, and she broke down into tears and ran out of the classroom. I came after her, admittedly rolling my eyes a little, having no patience at that moment for all the bubbling-over girl-drama. With my hands on her shoulders in the hallway, I spoke to her, very firmly, trying to be teacherly. And she told me that, at the age of 20, she didn't feel she had the experience needed to write anything. The essay that she had submitted, twice, circled briefly around an obliterating love affair. This was the good stuff, the stuff I wanted more about. She also went on to tell me that she was on medication for an anxiety disorder, and that she had been institutionalized once, temporarily, following a breakdown. And that she had a grandmother, she had never met, who was diagnosed as schizophrenic. She wanted to write about this stuff she said, but she didn't know if she could. Or should.

Shaking her just a little — she didn't really want to look in my eyes — I said to her, firmly, to write, for fuck's sake, to write, to fuck up and write about it and learn from it and never ever believe the bullshit that what she has experienced is not potentially all the valid stuff of literature. I don't know if I got through to her. I wonder what would have happened if I had had those hands on my shoulder, shaking me the fuck up, at her age.

I realize, as I'm writing this, that the young woman is still so fearfully depressed. It just has a new name. She is given new medication, and sent on her way. But why is she still so stopped?

Perhaps she is struck by the sense that the only world she knows is not deemed as rich enough as her own, her first person not complex or fictionalized or universal enough, for literature. She is prohibited from writing her messy, emotional self. What about the literary canons shoved down the throats of students made this student of mine who had had breakdowns and her heart broken feel she didn't have the experience to write? A fear and lack of egotism F. Scott Fitzgerald certainly never had.

Fitzgerald writing dismissively and furiously of his wife's literary efforts to her doctors: "It is still the idea of an Iowa high-school girl who would like to be an author with an author's beautiful carefree life." A-ha. The high school girl shouldn't write. Should be kept from writing. Also, the notion that girls don't burn and suffer and twist themselves inside out with the desire to write.

(Mr. Fitzgerald is a novelist, Mrs. Fitzgerald is a novelty.)

The absolute sneer in which Fitzgerald dismissed Zelda's novel as "automatic writing"—this is not purely a bias against Surrealism, like Truman Capote dismissing the Beats as not writing but typing, but the belief that her writing, her process, didn't undergo the necessary fictionalizing alchemy. It is loud and clear in the Fitzgerald transcripts

that Fitzgerald believes the entire world of the novelist is closed to Zelda.

He dismisses her writing as "sketches" (the term with which Viv's stories are often dismissed). The "sketch" is immediate, automatic, autobiographical, diaristic. The quick conversion from feelings and memories into words. Fitzgerald playing Professor X espouses the idea that Zelda couldn't handle the craft of fiction — he reads her as uncultivated. To him she is somehow untutored in the craft of fiction. She is naïve, illegitimate, intuitive (i.e. a girl). *Save Me the Waltz* is associative, emotional, messy, girly.

Zelda wrote *Waltz* in three months while Scott is stalling on *Tender*, it pours out of her, maybe because it's *her* story that she needs to unfurl from within her, this is her Scroll like Kerouac's tap-tapping away at his typewriter. Think of a young Jean Rhys, after her sugardaddy Lancelot Smith dumps her so ignomiously, her paralyzing post-break-up depression. Finally she peels herself out of bed and on a walk buys a set of exercise books at the stationary shop on a whim, and stays up at night filling them all up with the story of her life — the landlady said the neighbor below complained about sounds of laughter and tears through the night.

Jean Rhys pacing the floors, overcome with this freedom of writing, of telling her story, as opposed to having it told for her.

Jean Rhys who became an author out of heartbreak and intense emotion, like girls on their LiveJournals or Tumblrs.

Perhaps the young girl is still stricken with Gilbert and Gubar's "anxiety of authorship"—the ghosts of modernism haunt our present-day through the books shoved down our throats, through the narratives we have been told, and we've still internalized these poisonous prejudices, of what and how we should write, should present ourselves.

What prohibits the young girl from actually being an author? I think this idea of tradition is important. If she only sees herself as a character in the books she is given, these characters that are often pathologized, can she have the audacity to dream of being an author? Perhaps with girls there's less of a belief in their future genius.

And if their stories are published they are immediately branded as "women's fiction" or "young adult" or "chick lit." Hence not LITERARY. This doesn't happen as often to male coming-of-age narratives. Folded in this is the fucked-up idea that men don't read women, which is endemic of this disgust and ambivalence towards the Feminine in our culture and in our literature. V.S. Naipaul recently bleating about "feminine tosh" in women writing, decrying the novels of Jane Austen for their sentimentality (but even Fitzgerald wrote romances; it's who is privileged in our culture, who gets to name, who

controls the narrative).

I remember what it was like to have no real sense of self, to be dull with flashes of brilliance, trying on jobs like hats. Bored, restless, wanting. To live life quite foggily. And then to have one's fabric altered by the experience of suffering — this is when the young girl gains consciousness in the acuteness of her solitude.

Like that girl in my classroom I too wanted to be a writer before I wrote anything. And I too lived my *Bell Jar* days, I had my glossy magazine internship at *Time* magazine my senior year of college, where I buried myself in my room at night at the Webster, my all-girls boarding house, to work on an incomprehensible play on madness, going mad in the process. Me maxing out a newly opened credit card to buy clothes that felt Manhattan-appropriate. (Esther Greenwood sickened by being the happy girl in the magazine spread, feeling removed, alienated, from that outside image. Scott bought Zelda the Patou suit because he wanted her to be more stylish in the big city.) Everything was gray and corporate and I was experiencing my solitude for the first time. I sunk into a voluptuous depression — walking around the Village by myself, writing in my journal in diners, tapping away at my play in one of the rooms on the first floor where girls were allowed to receive male visitors, printing it all out illicitly at the Time Warner building after-hours, all while helping write little tourist pieces about literary landmarks in Manhattan where I had to tail it to Edgar Allan Poe's house in the Bronx or fact check something about the Alice in Wonderland sculptures in Central Park. And then returning back to Northwestern feeling so sure I could not be a journalist, that I needed to be a playwright or a novelist, but I didn't know how, and I felt intensely the weight of my failure.

This is what catalyzed my fall — the fall and the call and the pills and the alerted parents and the taxicabs to shrinks out of the telephone book and the hallucinations at 4 am from the cocktails of drugs licit and illicit and the waterbed I hacked to pieces with an axe because I didn't know how to get it out of my subletted apartment — the surreal certainty that I was a character, not a writer. That I would never be a writer. Why did this disturb a girl of 21, who had only written a bad play and a few even more mediocre short stories and boxes of unfinished journals and articles and theater reviews for the school paper? That I would not, could not, be a writer?

I became frightened by my sleepless nights. I was looking for any type of savior. The student health center gave me a photocopied hand-out on panic attacks. I opened the Yellow Pages, and I went that day, to the first psychologist who took me. During the diagnostic interview she asked me whether I drank, whether I took drugs, how many sexual partners I had had. I didn't realize you were supposed to lie. Within

that single session she diagnosed me as bipolar. She slid my credit card through a machine in her office for payment and motioned me next door to her business partner, the psychiatrist, who could see me immediately, and prescribed me a cocktail of Lithium, Depakote (an anti-convulsant), Klonopin, a benzo, and Paxil, an SSRI, which shot me through the roof, which the psychiatrist said made even more appararent my mood disorder, which is called in the DSM-IV bipolar III.

It was, in a way, despite the pharmaceutical intervention, an existential breakdown. I didn't know what I was going to do with my life. I was supposed to be graduating — and everyone else was lining up in suits for interviews with Anderson Consulting or getting reporter jobs at feeder papers for the *Trib* or the *Times*—I was reading Dostoevsky and Artaud, chainsmoking and writing madly in my diary. I didn't want to be a journalist anymore. Maybe a performance artist like Karen Finley, tits out, on stage, ranting in her huge voice, who I was reading about in C. Carr's collection of columns she wrote for the *Voice* in the 80s on the underground New York performance scene. Or a puppeteer. Or a mime. My senior year, I helped produce an experimental theater festival in a dilapidated building on campus called "The Shack." Wearing crystals from MAC around my eyes and flowing Indian tunics from the import shop.

I was coming into a consciousness then — in that I realized that I had been living my life as a sort of unformed character. As Lispector writes of her girl-character Macabea in *The Hour of the Star*—"To probe oneself is to realize that one is incomplete." And yeah, there was something about a boy. God, how I have been decimated by love affairs. Is this what interrupted me? Instead of writing novels I wrote painfilled journal entries and begging letters.

Yet I also knew I was changing. My depression, my broken heart, my solipsism, was at least making me turn inwards, have an inner experience, come into consciousness.

I was supposed to move to New York after graduation, and live in Queens with a girl I had met at the Webster, who had an internship in the costume department at Juilliard. I had an interview for a copy-editing position at the *Voice*. But instead I cracked. Became a psychiatric patient instead.

You'll always be spinning your wheels, Katie, the psychiatrist said to me at the time, trying to convince me to stay on the drugs, confident with that sort of armchair assurance that if not, my future was already written. At the time, my biggest desire was to finally really write, to complete things, even a journal. He told me that this was not likely if I lived my life unmedicated.

The girl read as undiscipined, disordered, not just struggling.

Scott to Zelda: “You were going crazy and calling it genius.” SHE is too often read as a psychiatric transgression.

He was so sure that this was my identity, and I believed him. Until the meds stopped working, or were making things worse, and he wanted to admit me into a mental ward and begin a treatment of electroshock. How very Sylvia Plath in the 1950s, I thought at the time. My parents decided instead to take me back to my childhood home in the northwest suburbs, and I went off the pills. My mother also decided while at home I needed to get a job (like Esther’s mother in *The Bell Jar* pushing her to volunteer at the maternity ward). The Steak ’n Shake nearby was opening — I lasted there in that paper uniform for a week (the busboy grabbed my ass and stole my tips from my tables). Soon I moved to Wicker Park, in the city, where I lived with Molly, my partner-in-crime from university, my fellow toxic girl. I waited tables at a 24-hour greasy spoon, the Hollywood Diner, where I served gangbangers and yuppies and tattoo artists and homeless people and hipsters and cops and pimps.

Even when I didn’t write anything but in my diary, I thought of myself at that time as a writer, in the romanticized mode of a Hemingway, or now perhaps a William Vollman (without the, you know, wars and bullfights and heroin, although there were hookers). Like Jane Bowles’s two serious ladies looking for a different level of experience, in slumming. Everything I did I did for EXPERIENCE, in order to someday write about it. (It was only years later I realized that I was pathologized, in part, for my experiences. I was diagnosed once I told of my past of hooking up and doing drugs.) At the Hollywood everyone thought of me as the well-educated writer-girl, who would someday write a novel about all of them. I always carried around a little notepad in my apron, or took down notes on napkins. I was a waitress waiting around to write something, eventually, once the intensity of life settled down.

During that time I decided someday I wanted to write the *Infinite Jest* for fellow fucked-up girls, for the slit-your-wrist girls like me. I hadn’t even finished *Infinite Jest*, but I knew it didn’t speak to me, just like I knew Kerouac’s *On the Road* didn’t speak to me, because he kept on writing about jumping into girls, and I knew I was one of the girls who were fucked and forgotten.

Yet no one had actually told me you could write about being a fucked-up girl. No one had given me permission, or told me that the young female experience was valid to write about in literature. This was not experience we are told we can use — our breakdowns, our love affairs. Too personal. Too emotional. Too “feminine tosh.”

My only antecedents I knew about were the radical New York downtown writings of the 70s and 80s, the exploits of Kathy Acker’s

"lousy mindless salesgirl" Janey Smith in *Blood and Guts in High School* and the George Miles cycles of Dennis Cooper or the memoir of the John Waters actress Cookie Mueller that I read while bored behind the desk in my brief stint at Powell's bookstore in Chicago after the Hollywood, while also waiting tables at an Italian café. A job I quit because one day I decided I'd rather drink bloody Marys and fuck my bass-playing boyfriend at the time in the bathroom of some bar in Lincoln Park rather than go into work.

It wouldn't be until years later that I would discover more writers in that era and then go back and reread Acker and Cooper more seriously and began to cohere it together in my mind as a tradition I could maybe be a part of, the ones that for me broke all the rules of what a novel should be, what writing should be, kind of my excessive-emotional connection to the outsider girl modernists, the High Risk anthology, the stories of Mary Gaitskill, David Wojnarowicz's ecstatic essay-rant *Close to the Knives*, the nonfiction novels of Chris Kraus or Eileen Myles, Laurie Weeks' *Zipper Mouth*, my publisher Lidia Yuknavitch's memoir *The Chronology of Water*. Some of these writers classified themselves as New Narrative writers, they bathed their works in theory like a mud bath, getting off on Bataille and Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, they were jacking off and defecating on the page/on their ancestors/on the establishment, the equivalent of what performance artists were doing on stage with bodily fluids like Finley with the chocolate smeared all over her mimicking shit, or Ron Athey piercing himself like some HIV-postive St. Sebastian on stage. They were writing with their bodies, writing that dealt with the disordered body. And their works were not only about fucking and not only about ideas but also about emotion, emotion for and through and transcending all of these things, pages and pages of goopy intense twisted emotion. When I finally discovered some of these writers, it wasn't really until my late twenties, almost 30, and it began to click for me — yes, I could write about being excessive and toxic, my whole life that came before could be drawn from, to write against the culture.

Why was my training as a toxic girl not considered the life experience with which to write my own coming-of-age story? There's this idea in our culture and in our literature that it's bad to write our excessive selves. To *be* excessive. The objective correlative.

The roaring twenties were actually literally Zelda's roaring twenties — she was born in 1900. Who doesn't fuck up and fuck around in their twenties?

We live in a culture that punishes and tries to discipline the messy woman and her body and a literary culture that punishes and disciplines the overtly autobiographical (for being too feminine, too

girly, too emotional).

We question our desires to write, wonder whether this is a self-destructive impulse, like that girl-student in my classroom. This was used against Zelda, against Mary McCarthy, a narrative corroborated by psychiatrists, critics, husbands — that it was anti-therapeutic to write of others, hence alienating them. The act of writing her life seen as a psychiatric transgression. How women have been pathologized or continue to be for taking back their own narratives. Even now the emotionally excessive text punished, criminalized. When she writes of an affair or fantasizing about an affair, when she critiques the domestic role.

Even in a class on creative nonfiction, still my student felt a prohibition against memoir, that it was BAD somehow. Perhaps counter to how girls are trained — to be nice, liked, no, *loved*. To not show the ugliness. Also this desire not to be disowned (yet we are already disowned by the culture, pushed back in the minor supporting role).

It's one thing to feel a sense of ethics when drawing from one's life. But the sense of guilt or shame or *badness* when writing the story that is our own seems to me a form of discipline and punishment. HE DO THE POLICE IN DIFFERENT VOICES. I wonder if Lowell or Fitzgerald felt the same internal pressure when they wrote their narratives, their break-downs?

The shame and guilt for writing her life, for living her life, the self-censoring violence. A silencing campaign.

Why is the girl so fearfully depressed? She feels she cannot write of her breakdown, of her interior state. She is fearful of being psychologized, pathologized, placed somewhere on the DSM. Like Woolf distancing her Rhoda, her Septimus Smith. She worries over being disowned, of being named, of being outed, ostracized. Yet all the more we need to fight against this ideology — to write these breakdown narratives, however naked.

My former partner-in-crime Molly is dead now — she killed herself right around the time John and I moved back to Chicago from London. At that point we had been estranged for many years. I had just started writing, seriously. My mother's death a couple years earlier was a catalyst, a further coming to consciousness, but I think for me Molly's death was truly what made me begin writing — when my other self died. (We were one, at one time, we were one and the same, my double, just like Esther and Joan in *The Bell Jar*.)

The girls I have known whose narratives have never been told — I feel such a responsibility towards them. Towards my former self as well.

Thinking about the scarring done when that psychiatrist had the

audacity to name me (if erroneously, therapists since then have discounted the idea that I experience the manic, or even hypomanic episodes to be considered bipolar). It was a trauma to my nascent writer-girl self. More than anything, he made me lose my nerve.

You will always be spinning your wheels. He said. Diagnosing me with an "obsessional illness" just like Zelda. "You were going crazy and calling it genius."

It cemented something in me, that maybe I wasn't a writer, that maybe I was just fucked-up, still these voices come at me in the dark, when I'm blocked, sometimes even when I'm too productive — what if this is all just word salad? What if I'm just crazy? The diagnosis works as a form of gaslighting. The neat disciplining frame. And then these narratives, we are told about women like Zelda or Vivien(ne), or even Sylvia Plath or Virginia Woolf, the myth-making, the demonology, that is gaslighting too. We don't want to be classified as the crazy chick.

The voices, the voices worm through: Sick Sick Sick.

My female writer friends battle with these codes of identity — we often write on our blogs about our personal psychiatric histories, or worry over whether we're being pathological, whether we should reveal our personal psychiatric histories or struggles with mental health. We are messy, intense, stressed, difficult, anxious, depressed. We are toxic, fucked up. (Yet whose language do we use? Is it our own? Or theirs?)

How does this infect us when we take up the pen, our identities married to a diagnosis? Our anxieties?

In modernism the madman is romanticized, glorified, yet still legitimized as an author, even once he is put away. Artaud, Nietzsche, Gérard de Nerval. Foucault writes of Artaud in his work on madness: "Where there is an oeuvre, there is no madness." I'm thinking too about Sylvère Lotringer's interview with one of Artaud's doctors at Rodez, the doctor who dimisses Artaud as mentally ill, his writing as the rantings of a madman. Lotringer fighting for the value of Artaud's texts in the world.

Herr Doktor: I consider his written work as a kind of scream, a scream of horror from a man who had no sense. And Lotringer says: When a mad person writes and that writing is read, it becomes literature.

Yet who decides what counts as an oeuvre? As Foucault has asked, "If an individual were not an author, could we say that what he wrote, said, left behind in his papers, or what has been collected of his remarks, could be called a 'work'"? Zelda is often classified as a "minor" writer because of her output — but she obviously wrote much that was destroyed, by others and herself. Yet what about Kafka's

output, unfinished and fragmented?

It all comes down to who gets to name, including the Professor X's listing off Great American Writers on their fingers. The madwomen of modernism have been named — diagnosed — and this diagnosis, this demonology has been endlessly repeated through how they have been documented, written about, and read. The codes of identity in psychiatry have molded their identity in literature, as characters and authors, and this extends also to how we read women in general, and to how women read and write themselves.

And we forgive our so-called geniuses so much, we allow them to be difficult, but are quick to make paper tigers and medusas out of the women. I'm thinking of that horrible hatchet job of Djuna Barnes, by her former assistant, about her last years, when she was an elderly woman, in her Trappist period at Patchin Place, almost blind and in terrible daily pain, guarding over her scraps of paper, many of which were going to the archives at the University of Maryland (which he is ostensibly helping her to prepare). She is writing her poetry collection which she types up on grocery lists. He depicts her as obsessive, pathological, like she's on an episode of *Hoarders*. Or like a modernist *Grey Gardens*, living in the weeds and detritus of the past. Her sin appears to be being a difficult woman.

The photos of the older Djuna by Berenice Abbott, mirroring the ones she took when Djuna was young and lovely and the height of fashion in Paris, the same aristocratic profile and ruffled shirts.

The Book of Repulsive Women—the name of one of Djuna's earliest chapbooks.

It was the stroke at 40 that turned Jane into a hag. She began to be seen around the Morocco grain stalls as a sort of bag lady, wringing her hands, giving her money away. Unable to write again, to speak clearly. Institutionalized in London because of extreme anxiety and depression. In and out of psychiatric treatment: in London, in upstate New York, later in Málaga, Spain. Shock therapy heavily encouraged by her husband and doctors. The doctors who "found her seedy-looking and bizarre. They thought her relationship to her husband bizarre, her sex life bizarre, even her published writing bizarre." They diagnosed her as manic-depressive, then schizophrenic.

I am reading Jane's last year. I am mourning my poor Jane, my poor shadowed Jane. I feel so viscerally for these women when I read their biographies. All these women and their abject ends. Demonized as angry old women or insane. We forgive the eccentrities of young girls (sometimes), but almost never those of older difficult women.

"Oh, I've heard of her," one of my students says in my Women and Literature class, years ago. We are reading Jane Bowles' story "Camp Cataract." "We read about her in my Abnormal Psychology

class."

The female author is reduced to a diagnostic category, which imprisons her, reduces her subjectivity.

The Baroness' biographer diagnoses her as schizophrenic.

Deirdre Bair's pathologizing biography about Anaïs Nin, which won the National Book Award. The biographer seems to really detest (and judge) her subject, and find her basically narcissistic and disgusting. I read an interview on *Salon.com* where she talked about handing over the journals to some distinguished panel of female psychoanalysts. They decide unanimously the writings are a classic case of adult-onset incest (the woman is a case). In the biography, she further pathologizes Nin for her glittery, associative, bodily, destructive stillbirth scene in her journal. "The account of the birth in the diary almost defies interpretation. It is a portrait of monstrous egotism and selfishness, horrifying in its callous indifference." (How often do biographies of Henry Miller put him on trial for his humanity or morality, or dismiss Fitzgerald or Hemingway for being alcoholics?)

Everything read through his genius, through her illness. The Great Men seldom diagnosed with mental illness, it undercuts the canonization.

At the conclusion of a largely sympathetic almost 700-page biography on Jean Rhys, Carole Angier retreats to diagnostic language and the authority of psychiatry, presenting Rhys' life story on a platter to doctors who decide she had borderline personality disorder. (*Why* do these biographers have this habit of handing over the writings/ materials to teams of doctors, and concluding with this diagnosis?) This is on the last two fucking pages. A tidy explanation. Some neat little bow.

Rhys's obsession with make-up seen as a sign. Her vanity. Just like Anaïs Nin. That gorgeous picture of Jean Rhys as an old woman, her white feathery hair still waved, face made up, still arranged in an elegant expression. One arm lifted to grasp the top of the chair.

Once they are diagnosed, every aspect of their biography is read and interpreted according to the disease. Their identities are married to the diagnosis.

As I write this, on Wikipedia Virginia Woolf is tagged as "People with bipolar disorder."

Actually, it seems so many of the biographies of these literary women that I have read retroactively diagnose their subjects with bipolar disorder (they don't specify which diagnosis on the current "spectrum"), and theorize that medications (usually outdated in the older biographies, or weakly corraled as "lithium") would have been a balm for these women, mirroring the overdiagnosis of the disorder in contemporary practice, as well as twinning the way "bipolar" has

seemingly become the new female malady du jour for the self-destructive or fucked-up girl/woman.

My students who reduce the characters in literature to symptoms. They can be solved, be fixed. They learn to be diagnosticians from TV, from people who armchair-diagnose celebrities. We diagnose female characters more than male characters. We psychologize them, pathologize them. Male characters have the convenient model of the anti-hero — do we ever talk of anti-heroines when we speak of literature? Is she, like, bipolar or something? My students ask of Edna Pontellier, of the character in "The Yellow Wallpaper," of Esther Greenwood, of Jean Rhys's Sasha Jensen. Someone I once met told me that in graduate school she went through *The Awakening* and highlighted every instance of what she saw as clinical depression. Then wrote an essay on it. Charlotte Perkins Gilman struggled with depression so the story must be her diary. When you reduce an author or character's torment to a diagnostic category you are not allowing her the existential alienation of a novelist-hero, but the narcissism of a heroine.

Only *Bildungsromans* featuring anxious heroes are feted. All the sad young literary men.

ANXIETY: When she experiences it, it's pathological. When he does, it's existential.

In Ben Lerner's recent novel, *Leaving the Atocha Station*, a young privileged neurotic poet is on a Fulbright in Spain (a work we can assume is at least semi-autobiographical, a la Christopher Isherwood, as Lerner has the same background, including the fellowship). In the novel he writes the intellectual man-boy, a literary version of Woody Allen or a contemporary Amory Blaine, who basically stays inside his apartment, looks up porn on the Internet, gets high, takes benzos, fucks or wants to fuck pretty Spanish girls who he doesn't even try to get to know, all the while meditating on art and literature. The brilliance of the novel is how aware the character is of his own fraudulence — his poetry, the way he treats women in his life, his English-language American-culture imperialism. My god though the novel is being feted as the tale of our times, written about rapturously by Lorin Stein in *The New York Review of Books*, by James Wood at *The New Yorker*. I mean, it's a beautiful book, but I don't get all the adulation. The narrative of the nervous girl would never receive that treatment.

We're Ophelias beneath the window. We're left outside. Drowning in our bathtubs.

The texts of the woman writer will be read, not as existential, but in starkly autobiographical terms. A woman is read so close to the body/skin. Both Flaubert and Ibsen can write the "New Woman,"

Emma and Nora, but they were not ostracized by their heroines' acts of exile, not like Kate Chopin was upon publication of *The Awakening*, a book modeled on *Madame Bovary*, even mimicking the opening pages, through the point of view of the dunce husband. Critics did not care for her heroine's "torment." I mean, Gustave was Emma, yes, but he wasn't really, he didn't have the burden. People didn't say, "Gustave, did you really try to take poison as a desperate cry for help? Gustave, did you really toss your wedding bouquet into the fire? Gustave, it's really a shame you didn't keep up with those piano lessons."

Maybe the girl's fearfully depressed in part because her alienation is never seen as existential and she is disciplined for her excess.

I think about Jean Seberg's character Patricia Francini in Godard's *Breathless*, the girl-reporter who wants to write novels and not be a sidekick in some film noir. I wonder if while making the film Godard was conscious of how much he makes Patricia a cipher, and shows this blank character who is searching for an identity, for a self outside of men, but is never really able to escape it. She wants to write novels, someday, like Faulkner, but she needs to sleep with her editor to write articles, and she must be a muse-baby for the famous novelist in order to get his attention. And her self-worth is completely bound up in how others see her, through another's gaze, and like a Jean Rhys heroine part of her only wants a Dior dress and a man who loves her. But there's this other part that's just forming, that is having a complete identity crisis, that is Simone de Beauvoir's woman questioning her immanence, questioning her lack of freedom, wanting something more, feeling dreadfully incomplete.

Yet in *The Second Sex* Simone de Beauvoir doesn't have much respect for the existential crisis of the girl. She sees her alienation, her sense of apartness, as frivolous, showy, without reflection: "Oppressed and submerged, she becomes a stranger to herself because she is a stranger to the rest of the world." To de B the young girl is doomed to immanence, she is Emma Bovary as Flaubert, not as Mary McCarthy has imagined her, enraptured by herself as her own heroine in the fantasies she has concocted.

There has been no female equivalent of *The Trial* or *Ulysses*, de B writes in *The Second Sex*, because women writers don't interrogate the human condition. "A woman could never have become Kafka: in her doubts and anxieties, she would never have recognized the anguish of Man driven from paradise." "Man" is the capitalized eternal, the transcendent — the woman has already been driven away, has always been excluded from this category.

Perhaps the woman cannot recognize the alienation of Man, but

she can certainly understand Eve, and what it means to be rewritten.

Claude Cahun's series of monologues, entitled *Heroines*, where she takes fictional characters such as Eve or Salome and gives their mythologies a hilarious, contemporary gloss, revisioning them as both flappers and aborted authors. She dedicates these pieces to girls everywhere.

In her girl portraits often published in "pulp" (hence not literary) journals like *College Humor*, Zelda writes of the young girl perennially imagining herself as a character, performance artists of surface and frivolity, although inside is this sense of apartness, of unexpressed sadness. There is a loneliness and lament to these pretty girls. Throughout, the author-narrator watches these girls, from a distance, perhaps the distance of the former self. There is Gay, in "The Original Follies Girl": "The thing that made you first notice Gay was that manner she had, as though she was masquerading as herself."

She isn't writing the American Dream perhaps, but the Frivolous Girl Dream.

Fitzgerald of course dismissed Zelda's stories as not saying anything greater about the human condition: "Did she have anything to say? No she has not anything to say."

The difference is privileging in literature a hero as opposed to a heroine. The difference is dismissing anguish that is seen as feminine, and not "universal" (i.e. masculine). Perhaps Gregor Samsas also take the form, in literature, of 18-year-old chorus girls, or unraveling divorcees, or suicidal overachievers from a prestigious woman's college.

This is an issue I have with some feminists in the Second Wave, how they often read writers of the girl — how they often dismiss the idea that these writers are actually philosophers of the girl, just like the Professor X's do. They neglect the concept that a philosophy of the girl is even possible. But also, there is this sense reading de Beauvoir and others that the woman writer must write an empowered woman, like Jo in *Little Women* or something. Maybe these women writers' heroines or anti-heroines are not empowered — but maybe they render honestly a flawed and skewed subjectivity. My main problem with de Beauvoir is that she doesn't give the silly girl any space to revolt. Maybe the girl seeks revenge by wedging herself into the larger cultural conversation.

The continuing education seminar on "Madness and Women Modernists" I taught at the Newberry Library the summer we moved back from London. I met with a dwindling class of three Newberry employees and female retirees all gung-ho about reading *Mrs. Dalloway* but put off by reading authors they had never heard of (we

also read Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*).

How we buy into this idea of the canon, its memory campaign that verges on propaganda, that the books remembered are the only ones worth reading.

Well, she was obviously an alcoholic, the WASP-y Newberry employee, her pageboy like black glass, says of Sasha Jensen, Rhys's boozy nihilist in *Good Morning, Midnight*, one of the finest evocations of breakdown ever written. (A novel that came out at the wrong time, at the dawn of the Second World War, when no one wanted to read something equally acidic and awash in tender melancholy.)

It is so exhausting sometimes to defend my women writers, my compatriots in this dark doomed country of ours. For we are not full citizens. We are forever caught without our papers.

"I just feel like Ford Madox Ford put a pen in her hand and said, write your diary, dear, we'll just edit it a lot." This is the black pageboy's friend and coworker, who had a blonde bob.

The atmosphere in the classroom grows into the public pathos of a Jean Rhys scene. I grow agitated, I get tears in my eyes, my face grows red. Later I find out the two women complained about me. The atmosphere was too "intense." I am not asked to teach there again.

I have thought often, however, about this scene in the classroom, these reactions to Jean Rhys that often mirror mainstream attitudes towards literature, and what literature should be.

What I find striking about the second woman's reaction to Rhys is that she questioned her right to authorship entirely. She is not author but heroine. The idea that some literary patriarch must have been the one to wrestle with her writing, make it into something else. The idea that a woman's life is, at its basis, raw material. She is read as raw material — too raw, too open, too needy, too emotional. She is the dilettante scribbling away in her diary. She does not even edit her own material.

Of course one could not be more wrong about Rhys. I know of no other writer who so painstakingly refined her prose more than Jean Rhys, who spent years whittling down lifetimes into her perfect, gemlike novellas of voice. She LABORED over her writing, to make it sing in such a way, to make it absolutely economical. The deceptive ease and flow of her work is excruciatingly difficult to accomplish. Like Hemingway, Rhys was a minimalist and cut away any excess language from her books — as the story goes, she was upset with her editor for *Wide Sargasso Sea* for publishing the work before it was ready — she felt there were two extraneous words in the entire text.

Inherent in these students' bias is, again, the criminalizing of the confessional. That this is somehow not "real" writing. It didn't go

through a necessary alchemy to make into literature.

The charges of borderline personality disorder are the same charges against girls writing literature, I realize — too emotional, too impulsive, no boundaries.

I wonder what would have happened if instead of reading the great gods in my twenties I had stumbled upon Jean Rhys instead? If I had other literary models, an alternative canon?

I first discovered Rhys when working at Foyles Bookshop in London. And I devoured her, I who had always been so devouring. In London all the silver Penguin Rhys paperbacks, alongside the gold Jane Bowles and Anna Kavan Peter Owen paperbacks.

Jean Rhys is the patron saint of girls, then women like me, who have always been so mute, cast aside, their subjectivity surrendered in the big novels, world. The patron saint of girls who are charming diversions until they grow old or one grows bored with them. And Jean Rhys writes back, the prose intoxicated, fragmented, elliptical, with snatches of song and dialogue. It is the singularity of voice that stands out, the perfectly tuned desolation and rage. Rhys who speaks for her mute vagabonds, her former (and present) selves, struggling from the bottom, sinking delirious in bottles of rouge, Pernod and barbituates — always another, please. The kept woman speaks back!

Except sometimes her characters don't speak. They think instead what they'd like to say to the cool, slimy face of patriarchy. (In *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* Julia thinks, "Because he has money he's a kind of god. Because I have none I'm a kind of woman.") Julia who has been "smashed up" by her lover leaving her, who worries over becoming "shabby" and growing old. The rage and violence and vulnerability in these forgotten women. That scene where Julia's staring at a Modigliani reproduction (the slanted honey-toned nude): "I felt as if the woman in the picture were laughing at me and saying: 'I am more real than you. But at the same time I am you. I am all that matters of you.'"

Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* may be my favorite book. I read it nearly every six months. I open it and then despair and wrench and fall madly in love. In the novel Sophia Jensen (who has changed her name to Sasha), visits Paris for a fortnight, after being saved by a concerned friend from drinking herself to death in London, and finds herself flooded with memories of the past. What Rhys does best: rooms and moods.

Sasha is like Duras' Lol Stein, she numbs herself with another Pernod, please, a bottle of wine on the tic, she numbs herself with passivity, but she is wide open to the cruel world, as if a layer of skin has been flayed off, and she cannot keep from being seduced by the past. She sits in public at cafes, feeling on Exhibition. She cries in

public. She is a wound ripped open. “Today I must be very careful, today I have left my armour at home.” She cannot but sink back to the past, flashbacks of her baby dying, her husband leaving, humiliating encounters with the outside world, piggy bosses and wolfy predators. The gramo-phone record going off in her head, here this happened, here that happened. Always an SOS, always something that can save her from herself, dying her hair blonde, a beautiful dress, a new hotel room with a better view.

But what Rhys does best is the ecstasy within the melancholy. Jean Rhys is not restrained despite her perfecting economy. She is messy, she spills over, her characters are Ophelias drowning in the whirlpool of their own emotions. But, oh, what emotion. What energy. The abject ending mirroring the end of the Molly Bloom passage in *Ulysses*, falling into the arms of a man who horrifies and disgusts her. Yes, yes, yes.

(I do not experience the anxiety of influence with these women writers that I love, no, no, I experience instead the ECSTASY of influence.)

Second Wave feminists like the novelist and critic Angela Carter have reacted so strongly to Rhys’ raw and sensitive heroines, who often cry in public, her “dippy dames,” as Carter calls them. Yet this is what I’ve always loved about Jean Rhys. Her characters are so girly and damaged.

In her essay collection *Nothing Sacred*, Carter reads Jean Rhys as being a “female impersonator,” (a critique she also levels at the female characters in D.H. Lawrence) mostly because she writes her characters as wounded and scarred. It seems an older generation of feminist critics have swallowed some sort of narrative punishing women who are too feminine that reflects the revulsion towards the excessive that comes right out of patriarchy. These feminist critics take it a step further and say this is not an adequate reflection of how women live their lives. This is a move of the Second Wave I distrust, that women must write, must *be*, empowered heroines, and if they are not, they are frivolous and should be dismissed.

This feminist infighting allegedly began with the First Wavers and the flappers, the prejudice against modern girls so frivolous and excessive. The Victorian suffragette dismissing the shop-girls as victims of consumerism and silly girls for spending their paychecks on dangling earrings and silk pantyhose and jeweled cigarette cases, as if their sartorial excesses somehow set back the movement. Just like the straight-laced Second Wavers have become tightlipped over young feminists’ adoration of celebrity culture and fashion magazines. (Susan Faludi’s recent tirade in *Harper’s* over young feminists’ love of pop culture and Lady Gaga.)

The only protection for a Jean Rhys heroine is clothes. The magical properties of a dress or a pair of silk stockings. If to change one's room is a sort of optimism, hope is a new dress. Rhys so accurately depicting the material and economic reality of a woman lacking independent means. "You look at your hideous underclothes and you think, 'All right, I'll do anything for good clothes. Anything — anything for clothes.'"

In her diaries Virginia Woolf noted that she was also interested in what she called "frock consciousness," a consciousness that involved not only the *jouissance* of shopping, but also its dread counterpart, the construction of a fragmented self for the outside gaze. Woolf, regularly profiled by British *Vogue*, would go dress-shopping with the editor, but often felt panicked and put off by the experience. In *Room* Woolf calls for the Mary Carmichaels to write their relationship to their own, true world, to "the everchanging and turning world of gloves and shoes." But she warns too that this literature will also be dismissed, as we see in the treatment of the novels of Jean Rhys and others. Much as in life, so-called masculine experiences in literature are seen as universal, versus feminine experiences, which are often derided as for women only and sub-par (chick lit, chick flicks). "Speaking crudely, football and sport are 'important,' the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes 'trivial,'" Woolf writes. Of course a lot of commercial fiction geared towards women does trade in easy stereotyping and conspicuous consumption. All the more urgency and necessity for literary explorations of the ambivalent yet authentic experiences of women, to tell the story of themselves as well as Woolf 's "girl behind the counter," whether observed or remembered.

The purity of the ideology of the Second Wave, I believe, makes us lie about the dividedness and contradictions of our lives for fear of being seen as bad feminists. It took me years before I could confess my love of make-up or clothes. My fellow bloggers often post images from various couture shows or fashion spreads on their Tumblrs or Facebook pages.

Perhaps feminists' putdown of girls simply reifies the aversion towards the feminine that is such an integral part of patriarchal society. Does literature written by women need to be feminist, or does it need to be honest, to document the cultural reality? Yes, to critique it but also to explore its nuances, and perhaps even to subvert it. For sometimes we are destroyed by love. Or we don't want to get old. These thoughts still haunt many of us. The novels of Rhys address the complexities of both our subjectivity and objecthood, our psychic colonialism, in a way that seems still so modern.

The woman in that seminar was correct — Jean Rhys did write out of a diary, but why is this seen as so ridiculous and unliterary?

The plain brown songbird of a notebook Rhys called “The Ropemaker Notebook,” she kept while staying at The Ropemaker’s Arms in London while her third husband Max was in prison for something amounting to fraud, both of them old, sick, fragile, desperately poor. In this notebook especially we see Rhys mercilessly explore and critique and construct herself — it is in this notebook that she began to explore the themes of the haunting, perfect, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, especially that of madness as the loss of self.

One of my favorite Rhys pieces is in this notebook, a memoir fragment called “The Trial of Jean Rhys,” published in her posthumous collection *Smile, Please,* an interrogating voice which reminds me of Nathalie Sarraute’s memoir *Enfances*. Rhys would have been used to the language of trials as she was perennially hauled into court at this time for physical altercations with neighbors. But in this piece at least there are no easy enemies, and it reflects what I love most about Rhys, the searing exorcism, the naked honesty, the interrogation of the “difficult” woman. In this piece she examines herself ruthlessly, she is both persecuted and persecutor.

DEFENCE. *It is untrue that you are cold and withdrawn?* It is not true.

DEFENCE. *Did you make great efforts to, shall we say, establish contacts with other people? I mean friendships, love affairs, so on?* Yes. Not friendships very much.

Did you succeed?

Sometimes. For a time.

It didn’t last?

No.

Whose fault was that?

Mine I suppose.

You suppose?

Silence.

Better answer.

I am tired. I learnt everything too late. Everything was always one jump ahead of me.

The phrase is not ‘I do not know’ but ‘I have nothing to say.’ The trouble is I have plenty to say. Not only that but I am bound to say it.

Bound?

I must.

Why? Why? Why?

I must write. If I stop writing my life will have been an abject failure. It is that already to other people. But it will be an abject failure to myself. I will not have earned death.

“I will not have earned death.” I love that. To me the life of Rhys reflects the relentless desire to write, even when not publishing, that

great chasm of decades between the publication of her modern between-the-war novels and *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966. Even when she is not publishing, the compulsion to write, to uncover. To EXIST. To write, above all to write. To channel her memories and her emotions and to distill and communicate, and yes, transcend her existence. And how integral her notebooks were to her process (of writing, of living, of surviving), even when the notebook form for women writers is so often dismissed.

My apprenticeship as a writer began with an elaborate notebooking system (or rather it was the second stage, the earlier one was being a fucked-up girl writing in my diary). When we returned to Chicago from London I began to start up a journal again, keeping up a fastidious, constant diary in black Moleskines. The notebooks at the beginning were filled mostly with automatic writing and observations, and often with notes on the biographies of the mad wives. I called this project "Scratches," after Michel Leiris, a personal project to push myself to write my own quotidian, to write these moments that I realized I abruptly surrendered to amnesia. A desire to write what Woolf called the "violent moods of my soul" that she too hoped to capture in her diaries, her life-writing.

I wanted to write down everything that happened to me in the present, in an attempt to understand myself, mirroring the diaries of these modernist women. At the beginning of The Ropemaker Notebook: "This time I must not blot a line. No revision, no second thoughts. Down it shall go. Already I am terrified. I have none of the tools of my trade. No rows of pencils, no pencil sharpener, no drink. The standing jump." Anaïs Nin whose project was to write the "absolute truth" in her diaries. "Reality deserves to be described in the vilest terms," she wrote within. Her diary was often self-reflective of the act itself, of the process.

I filled up those first Scratches notebooks so quickly — the memories poured out, as I tried to make sense of myself, meditating on the act of writing, why I was writing, who I was as a writer. They were my first nascent stirrings of a revolution, a revolution from deep inside. With my unruly notebooks I was mimicking and mirroring Jean Rhys when she first began to write, when her first major love affair ended, those exercise notebooks she purchased from the stationary shop. How she stayed up all night pacing the floor remembering everything that happened in her past year, "what he'd said, what I felt," writing into the night. And Rhys carried these three exercise notebooks around with her for years, in all of her many moves, as I did with those early notebooks, and then how hers formed the basis for *Voyage in the Dark*, her novel with her youngest heroine.

For so long I didn't know what to do with these diaries, these

notes on my quotidian as an unpublished woman writer and my studies of the mad wives, like Anaïs Nin wondering whether to frame her diary as fiction, or Jane Bowles with her novel trapped inside of her notebooks, her character Emmy Moore writing a fictionalized journal, hoping for publication. Throughout I was struggling like these women to transmute my memories and experiences into fiction. FICTION was the lofty, the only goal, the god. Other "characters": not me. Perhaps this struggle contributed somewhat to Jane Bowles' block. The struggle to transcend her life, how to fictionalize her own material.

Anaïs Nin also agonized over the material in her journal, how to convert it into fiction. Every year Nin applied for the Guggenheim fellowship (and was rejected) — proposing a project to convert all of her diaries into one long novel. That portrait of her in the vault at UCLA, her hair in the elegant chignon, surrounded by her diaries, which numbered 65 at the time. Her diaries were so easy and fluid for her. Anaïs Nin would spend hours, literally her days, writing in her diary. It was her chosen form, a form often considered illegitimate and dangerous as a compulsion, like Zelda's dancing.

I think of how important a role the diary played in the processes of women writers that I adore (Jean Rhys, Emily Holmes Coleman, Elizabeth Smart, Virginia Woolf, all passionate diarists). There is now a movement coming out of feminism to appreciate and rediscover the private writings of women, to recover female authors and reappraise the brilliance of texts previously reduced to the ephemeral, the archival, such as Alix Roubaud's notebooks, recently published by Dalkey Archive Press, or the collected writings of Laure, published at City Lights, or Anaïs Nin's unexpurgated diaries. However there is still the sense that these works are valuable often because of their connection to a famous literary man (Jacques Roubaud, Georges Bataille, Henry Miller).

Yet the diary is often still considered an inferior form of writing by both critics and the culture-at-large. Elizabeth Hardwick especially is devastating in her dismissal of the scribbling sister, this definitively feminine literary tradition. In her essays on Jane Carlyle and Dorothy Wordsworth, she categorizes the diarist as the amateur, not the professional, ideas also echoed by Simone de Beauvoir.

This also makes me think of Hardwick's vitriolic takedown of Anaïs Nin's first book, *Under A Glass Bell*. Why does she hate me so much? Nin wonders in her diary after the review. There's a lot of this disgust and hatred towards Nin by other women writers. I also wonder at this — perhaps it's because Edmund Wilson was now courting Nin, and writing about her self-published book in *The New Yorker*, of all places. Perhaps Hardwick was playing mean girl/defensive best friend

to Mary M. God I love literary gossip.

The diary especially is read through the context of modernism as a form of automatic writing, but worse, of automatic feeling, it is the intensity of emotions expressed that seems to render it unserious, unliterary, which connects in general to literature by women that comes out of the diary form. This is because girls write in a diary.

Rainer Maria Rilke in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* who laughs softly at the young girls writing in their diaries, imagining their hearts and animals drawn. But he was writing a diary too, or he distinguished it as a notebook and then fictionalized it, novelized it, based on his own journals he kept in his early, anonymous years in Paris. Yet it is read as great literature (quite deservedly), read as philosophy, as are Camus' notebooks and Fernando Pessoa's *Book of Disquiet* and Bataille's *Guilty*. Why isn't Colette Peignot's name mentioned in *Guilty*? Perhaps to make his suffering about the war, about spirituality, into something universal — that attempt towards the transcendent in literature, which often involves erasing the girl.

But what about her book of disquiet? Often the girl-diarist's efforts are read as necessarily cliché in the failed attempt to render something more original, to articulate a yearning emptiness and isolation. Yet can't we also read her diary as a theater of potential great feeling and discovery, of experimentalism and play?

The keeping of the diary is seen as a girlish, self-involved act to Simone de Beauvoir, who writes, "The girl who speaks to her notebook the way she used to speak to her dolls, as a friend, as a confidant, and addresses it as if it were a person." Yet girls write in diaries as a way to navigate and create who they are, the distance between their private *agonistes* and the self that is supposed to smile. A diary as a way for girls to be kept safe, to feel free to write her emotions and nascent ideas without being disciplined.

This is often the mode that allows her to come to writing — perhaps this is why it's so widely derided as not literary or seen as raw material. Yet the diary is part of the girl's process — a way to do the work. And of course now we write our diaries in public, for all to see.

First her LiveJournal. Now her Tumblr. So many of these Tumblr spaces are gorgeously written. Many of these girls identify intensely as writers, as artists. These visual notebooks fetishize the handmade, the handwritten, the deeply-felt, posting images of their own painfully scrawled notes, or reposting others' love letters or diary entries or handwritten affirmations or pages of lovingly-kept journals, feeling a resonance in others' words, which calls to mind the textdrawings of the plaintive scribble by Louise Bourgeois or Tracey Emin. An *Arcades Project* of her fragments, the girl at her locker, her own mood board —

as diverse and fragmented as she is — often elegantly composed yet chaotic, at turns intense, emo, promiscuous, gorgeous, dizzying, jarring, anarchic, irreverent, cinephilic, consumed, consuming, wanting, witty, violent, self-loathing or self-doubting, suicidal, broken, brave, banal, brilliant, plaintive, porny, screaming, abject, authentic, starved, starving, sentimental.

On these Tumblrs, girls collage images of other girls in rapid succession, an ideal mirror, from polished starlets all evening-gowned to streetscenes of trainwreck yet still glamorous former child stars to 20s flappers to goth suicide girls to couture layouts to posed modelly pretty girls to film stills of French New Wave actresses like Anna Karina or screenshots of films like Sofia Coppola's *The Virgin Suicides* (and Coppola's melancholy dreaminess in that film informs the aesthetics of many a Tumblr, interesting because the film and the novel it is based on, by Jeffrey Eugenides, is narrated by the neighborhood boys, who wonder after the interior life of the departed Lisbon sisters, who they imagine as mystic-muses). Also strung out with punk-rock or pithy slogans, quotes from Virginia Woolf or Sylvia Plath or Friedrich Nietzsche, or a quote from Fernando Pessoa next to a quote from, say, Nicholas Sparks or *Twlight*. Counterpointed with jokey dialogue in TV shows or visual mash notes to famous crush objects. I like this new model of the reader I see online: the girl as ecstatic and promiscous reader, both craving the radical thrust and the sentiment. And their authorship has as its dominating ethos homage and plagiarism (how Kathy Acker would have loved these Tumblrs).

And in this subsubcommunity of literary blogs I've come into contact with through *FFIMS*, many of us also read and write like girls. It is perhaps not "serious" criticism, but intensely personal and emotional. A new sort of subjectivity is developing online — vulnerable, desirous, well-versed in both pop culture and contemporary writing and our literary ancestors. We write in public (in our blogs, on our Tumblrs, in comments sections on other's blogs, on Facebook) a new, glib, casual, entirely feminine form of criticism that takes the form at times of heroine-worship. A fan fiction. We read, intensely and emotionally, like Emma Bovaries. We read like girls, often prone to passion and superlatives — passing around books like love letters in the mail. These spaces operate as safe havens to be all sorts of identities at once, to be excessive, to feel and desire deeply.

Yet what we are writing are essays, in Montaigne's sense, the idea of circling, exploring, of attempting something. Sometimes they are essays into ourselves, who we are, as writers, as desiring or abject bodies. We pride ourselves on strange disjunctions and connections from theory, literature, pop culture. Essays written by Joyelle McSweeney, Roz Ito, Danielle Pafunda, Jennifer Lowe, Suzanne

Scanlon, Kate Durbin, Johannes Göransson, Angela Simione, Roxane Gay, Mike Kitchell, Jackie Wang, Blake Butler, Kristen Stone, Kari Larsen, The Rejectionist, too many others to name, those I am not even aware of, other communities of writers, some in other countries. These ideas all frantically circulate. These spaces become ones not only of emoting but of intense inquiry. We link to each other, we pass along books.

But these aren't strict formalized book reviews. Often sprawling, associative, automatic. Messy, girly.

My blog began as a cocky, ecstatic sprawl, weaving in and out of anecdotal passionate homages to women writers I adored, posting their fuck-me-fatale photos, to sacrilegious reflections on the Surrealists to a sort of aesthetics theory, favoring what I then characterized as the bulimic versus the anorexic text. I sent links to the blog to a few writers I knew who had large online presences, and all of a sudden I had readers, and a flood of comments pouring in. The first post was cheekily entitled: "Why I Write Such Excellent Blog Posts." An automatic writing (feel, then write, then push publish on Blogger).

For my criticism came out of, has always come out of, *enormous feeling*. Often the feeling was anger, finally allowed to let loose in these visceral rants. (I had written book reviews previously, for publications like *Bookforum* or *The Believer*, but my editors expected the pretense of objectivity, a journalistic gloss, these blog posts felt like I was committing a gleeful hari-kiri on my journalist girl-self.) Virginia Woolf hiding behind Mary Carmichael in *Room*, not wanting to write the self in her criticism (although like Elizabeth Hardwick, it is everywhere diffused in her essays). Writing about the "red light" of anger as impeding one's mind, one's argument (in opposition to the "white light" of truth). But what's wrong with writing out of anger?

I am beginning to realize that taking the self out of our essays is a form of repression. Taking the self out feels like obeying a gag order — pretending an objectivity where there is nothing objective about the experience of confronting and engaging with and swooning over literature. The comments on *Frances Farmer Is My Sister* and allied blogs that have built sometimes to this glorious other text, this communion, this conversation, this casual liquidness, the superlative nature, that is generative and affirming as opposed to dismissive, that uses our own language instead of theirs.

And when I think about so much of the writing happening online, I think about the notebook form, and especially what Hardwick performs in *Sleepless Nights*, the drifting anecodotes mixing real-life characters with literary references, this tapestry. Also: Joan Didion's *The White Album*, Renata Adler's mosaic *Speedboat*. Elizabeth

Hardwick was inspired especially by *Speedboat* for her *Sleepless Nights* —both scrapbooks that are kaleidoscopic, anecdotal, self-aware, witty, and intensely nostalgic. Both women who previously needed to rely on the objectivity of the critic (Adler with film, Hardwick with literature), but in their nonfiction novels they write the self, their experiences. In *Sleepless Nights*, Hardwick critiques what has been historically considered worthwhile material for a novel: "It certainly hasn't the drama of: I saw the old, white-bearded frigate motion on the dock and signed up for the journey. But after all, 'I' am a woman." *Sleepless Nights* shows a mind, a library at work, an old woman surrounded by her books.

All these experiments being written online — notes for projects never written, resembling sketches from Camus's notebooks, experiments in the epistolary, the fragmented, this casual, cultural criticism, some of it in the comments. It is all ephemeral, not wanting to be formalized. I am beginning to think of this note-taking as the project itself.

Bhanu Kapil dismantling the novel in her *Notes on Ban*, notes for a character and a work that stands in for the work itself, some of these she writes online, in the margins, others published, formalized. Suzanne Scanlon who accretes such amazing bodily essays, who writes of her past of being a fucked-up girl in a way that reminds me of Mary McCarthy, or Colette, while collaging throughout a variety of literary sources. Suzanne's pieces are often fictionalized, in that she changes names, the myth is that when one writes from the self one does not already alter, shape, adjust the text's rhythms. It's astonishing to me she doesn't yet have a book. What she does have is a brilliant and, yes, literary blog. I remember telling her once when we were having drinks in Chicago that she needed to publish some of what she was writing on her blog — and she got this look on her face, like what would it be? Essays? Creative nonfiction? Fiction? Still this question of genre strangles us. Of fiction, of distance and form. But perhaps these blogs are a new form, a new genre. Like Montaigne's essays self-reflective, circling around itself.

I think this whole question of publishing what we are writing online really begs these questions that remain from modernism — what is the work? Who is an author?

Yet perhaps our writing needs to be fragmented to fit our fragmented times. Sometimes yes the online notebooks feed our other writing, as experimental incubators, like Rhys with her Ropemaker Notebook. But sometimes the posts are just what they are — unfinished, fragmented, explorations into something. We don't wish to formalize them into books. We want them to remain as they are — RAW, our own material. And how liberatory and open this virtual

space can be, we are allowed to present different personas, performances, like Pessoa's heteronyms, like Viv's heteronyms for *The Criterion*. And online we get absolute permission not to push towards "finishing" towards "polish" towards "professionalism."

The Professor Xs would hate our blogs: unfinished, bodily, excessive, nakedly autobiographical, even when written under pseudonyms. Perhaps all the reason to write them.

Yet what happens to the blogs and Tumblrs, these infinite, immaterial notebooks? One can erase them but even then they may persist, traces of them still saved somewhere on the Internet. Who is archiving these scraps of our existence? Those who decide what is important or not to archive. Who to preserve, what to throw away. If you are considered important enough, John tells me, any note or scribble relating to your work is valuable.

This is a memory campaign. Who is canonized, who is remembered. It begins with reviews and filters down to who is taught in schools and then whose papers are collected by which library. If you are a Great Author — then EVERYTHING needs to be saved and documented. Salman Rushdie's laptops saved at Emory. David Foster Wallace's undergraduate philosophy thesis published. And how carefully their materials are handled, unlike Vivien(ne)'s notebooks mouldering or lost in the Bodleian.

Fitzgerald saving carbons. His detailed life ledger. Documenting Zelda's abortion. He preserved everything, his letters, notebooks of observations, character ideas,some published posthumously in *The Crack-Up*. (He preserves everything except his wife, who he helped destroy.) The notes at the end of *The Last Tycoon*. He died before he could finish it. Heart attack in Hollywood, tended to by his mistress. Plath's notebooks in the end, all notes, ideas, works, sketches. Ted Hughes wrote that this was a sign of a spiritual death, she was dead before she killed herself, as her notebooks dissolved into notes. The idea being, I suppose, that those who catalogue their lives exhaustively stop existing when they stop documenting the self amidst the clutter of other voices and events.

What does it mean to be aware of one's own preservation? To preserve the self. I save myself, my days. This archive of the self. These women who haunt me, I want to save them too, to carry them forward with me.

It is the wives and mistresses perhaps who would have blogged and tumbled their fragments, all of their delicious brilliant witty urges they instead scrawled into journals and notebooks like Zelda, Jane and Viv, into letters, into conversation later snatched up by the male author. I imagine Jane Bowles would especially have found this form rather freeing, she who suffered for thirty years from writer's block,

which I think about now as really being blocked because of this oppressive idea of the massive BOOK in our culture, totalizing and emblematic of our talents as writers. I'd like to think that the women of modernism would have forged a community of their own in this space.

I think back to those early posts, that seemingly flowed out of me, like channeling, Yeats with his Georgie-girl. It's one of the only times I have never felt stopped or blocked from writing. I refused to be censored. It helped being so isolated in Akron, knowing no one, having no one aware of me. How freeing that all was. Sometimes I still feel that sense of *jouissance* blogging, but now I'm so much more aware of readership, who's going to comment or not, if no one has commented in a while, whether I'm transgressing some boundary by writing about X, Y, or Z.

With my first published book, I had to exit the private bubble of my dinner party with the mad wives, and begin to negotiate becoming a public writer-self in the world. Because of this, the blog began to be overtaken by doubt, or rather become a performance of this doubt. The posts began to be about what it was like to be a minor writer in the world, these moments of humiliation, of abjection, of shame. Perhaps a refusal to swallow, a vomiting forth.

And thus began a public diary experiment, threading throughout a reflection on what I was reading, using literature as a way to make sense of my existence (some might call it Bovarizing). I wasn't the only one doing it — there's a whole league of us writers who are theatricalizing our lives. We make each other characters in our narratives, some of us constantly referencing, linking to, and reading each other. Our blogs reflect a performance of the self that is as much about our private lives as it is about navigating a public space. We are the relentless documentarians of our own quotidian, its gorgeous gasps and banalities. There are bloggers who are specifically diarists, like Rebecca Loudon, or Jennifer Lowe, or Angela Simione, who has taken lately to scanning her handwritten diary entires as blog posts. Today, Today, we title our posts. This reminds me of the beginning of Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina* ("in fact, today is a word which only suicides ought to use; it has no meaning for other people"), a work that is a beautiful meditation on how to navigate being both the woman-writer and the woman-character. Online we negotiate and navigate what it means to be a writer, for some of us what it means to be a woman, except we aren't celebrities like Bachmann was in her time in Austria.

Yet of course many of us don't write every day. Sometimes there are long lapses of not writing or posting. That's why I think of this

form as a form of *l'écriture féminine*: a rhythm of silence and raw emotion, these fervent utterings.

Colette Peignot writing on her scrap of paper that she gave to Bataille as she lay dying, a communication felt as nakedness. These scraps that we pass back and forth to each other. A dialogue, a communication: the Internet. So intimate. These writings are the shudderings of the ego and lamenting the wound. We blubber and ooze. Texts that are raw and vulnerable, bodily and excessive. Sometimes freaking out in public. We are naked, like Karen Finley.

My blog at time feels like a toilet bowl, a confessional, a field hospital.

Our posts are often self-reflective, interrogating the form itself, threatening often to quit it, worrying that it deviates from our "real" writing. The girls who cry Woolf. All these fragmented, image-strewn, public records of self which are sometimes about the disintegration of self. We are nauseous, narcissists.

Sometimes there seems to be so much dialogue and activity and feverish writing in this public space, and sometimes it seems to retreat. Perhaps we are performing our own oblivion that we feel as writers in the outside world, many of us unpublished or published on small presses. Lately I feel no one's been blogging anymore, no one's commenting, everyone's quitting, forming new blogs, new aliases, and then it all begins again. We cycle together. A fear and compulsion towards confessionalism, towards blurring boundaries. We write of this bleeding.

The pithy punchline bully of *HTMLGIANT*, Jimmy Chen, recently grafted a chart of Internet personas where he has named me, as well as a handful of others, as "menstrual" bloggers (on the opposite end of the spectrum, the "douches"). My response on my own blog was inflamed, indignant. Bringing up the Papin Sisters, pointing out modernism's fascination with and horror of the feminine, her body, her emotions, embodied to me by the mad wives, Vivien(ne) and Zelda, who were disciplined and policed by both the literary theories their husbands espoused as well as psychiatry (not only how women should behave, but how literature should behave).

Yet my post on the matter was also woozy, hurt. I wrote about the serious health problems I had been experiencing, how this recent episode came at a particularly hilarious or cruel moment, depending on how you look at it, as I lay in bed, bleeding, like a reincarnation of Vivien(ne) Eliot. Soaking sheets with red. My clots of blood. My endometriosis worsening, the then-imminent exploratory surgery.

But oh, the mess. The excess.

How others rallied by me when Jimmy Chen made his chart. A string of comments, support, some medical advice. All very girly and

gooshy.

But I think perhaps this idea of being a menstrual blogger is something to reclaim. Maybe my style *is* hormonal (what does this mean? too confessional? moody? emotionally charged? female? irrational?). In this community, if I can call it that, of writer-bloggers, many of us write of our bodies. Our periods. Yes, we write on our periods. The poet Ariana Reines posting her bloody panties on her Tumblr. We put everything out there, including the taboo, like Anaïs Nin. Our abject encounters pulled from the past, like Dodie Bellamy's blog posts on an ex-lover she calls The Buddhist, that later became a book. Jackie Wang's woozy, emotive, automatic writings on Ambien. (Although the beyond brilliant young critic also writes posts weaving in and out theory and the history of radical art, as well as deep philosophical essays on identity and political will.)

We are personal bloggers. We take things so, so personally. We are huge masses of emotion. *Too much*, as Jackie Wang calls it. Our blogs full of rage, tenderness, soreness.

Yet sometimes even I think there must be something sick about all this confessionalism. This self-loathing comes out of the culture. We cannot help but internalize an absolute disgust for both the diaristic and confessional in our literary criticism. Fitzgerald brutalized for his confessional essays he wrote for *Esquire*, John O'Hara dismissing his "orgy of self-pity." This prohibition against writing the self, the fleshly, the feminine, that comes out of modernism. A disgust for Anaïs Nin is perhaps a disgust for the girls with their online diaries.

PHOTOGRAPHY: bad to write the naked, the true, the confessional. I think that is often why we pull back. These great lulls on the Internet. We are sometimes horrified by what we have written, we press erase, or some literally scratch out the post, the strike-through bisecting the words, so that you can still read underneath. We are stricken with this sense sometimes that we are too much self, we gaze at our navels. Often we threaten to take down our blog. This act called "suiciding." Or we put ourselves on a hiatus, and then come back a few days or a month later. Our dramatic disappearing acts. The theatrical comebacks in broad day.

We are always ready to shut down the blog because we're worried about who's reading it, family members, workplaces surveilling us, would-be employers. We worry over being disowned for writing the autobiographical, for divulging info about our psychiatric histories, the truth of our toxic girl-pasts, our gooshy, goopy, confessions. We worry over being found out — by coworkers, family, our students. So some of us already veil ourselves in pseudonyms, in password-protect.

I think about this need for public confession, and how this is often

denigrated as not writing. It is perhaps the most crucial thing however to write of one's breakdown. Why do I feel the need to plug in to my blog and write of my sleepless nights, my three o'clocks in the morning? Communion perhaps. Company. Some sort of public sharing. But when is it oversharing? Self-indulgent? Who owns these terms and who gets to decide? How painful and difficult it is to write of the unraveling, for so many reasons.

For the woman is deemed as dangerous who goes out of bounds, who lacks boundaries (by writing the self, the body, the emotion). The woman writer who dares to spill out of bounds is disciplined, contained. Dodie Bellamy in her essay collection *Academonia* writing about the unemployability of the woman writer who writes explicitly about emotions and the body. (HE DO THE POLICE IN DIFFERENT VOICES. We are policed, surveyed.)

The recent incident of a professor at the University of Houston rhetorically disciplining and shaming the poet Jennifer Lowe, who is in their Ph.D. program in creative writing, for the confessional nature of her heartfelt, poetic, blog of the quotidian. As opposed to swallowing this, J.Lowe went public in a beautiful and visceral essay on *HTMLGIANT*, building this event into a reflection about this emerging form, and the oft-threatened position of the confessional woman writer within these institutions, and, even broader than that, the feelings of shame and smallness women writers can carry around with them, the self-censoring violence.

Although the blog is an emerging form, this question of women swallowing panic about the autobiographical, and often censoring themselves, or being asked to, is nothing new.

The horror/shame/worry: of being discovered, disciplined, ostracized. This is what that student in my creative nonfiction workshop was worried about too, I think. The reason why women use pseudonyms, women have always used pseudonyms. The Brontë Sisters become the Bells. Perhaps Anon is a Woman, Woolf muses in *Room*. Perhaps this is still true. Genius is a Man, Anon is a Woman.

So, the decision to write the private in public, it is a political one. It is a counterattack against this censorship. To tell our narratives, the truth of our experiences. To write our flawed, messy selves. To fight against the desire to be erased. Why try to make these personal confessions public? Why write one's diary in public? To counter this shaming and guilt project. To refuse to swallow. To refuse to scratch ourselves out. To refuse to be censored, to be silent. Or to circle around that silence, like a traumatic scene.

Part of the occupation of a woman writer, is still, perhaps, killing the angel in the house, fighting against repression, as Virginia Woolf wrote so long ago. A spiritual struggle against the good girls inside of

us (two oppositional forces: we want to write, we want to be loved). Zelda too was forced to choose between her marriage, and being a writer.

But the important thing now is to write. To write. To not hold back. To tell our narratives. To not be stopped. Publishing, even, can come later. But if you censor your writing with a view towards employment, what you're writing is probably going to be safe and hygienic anyhow.

I decided at some point I was going to approach the position of being a writer in society as being an orphan. I have begun to cultivate this status as an outsider. I think the mad wives have allowed me to do this. The bloggers that I have formed kindred bonds with allow me. They make me feel less alone. I am outside, writing in the margins, for my fellow illegimitate sisters.

I realize my blog may be an impediment, maybe a serious handicap, to future job prospects. And maybe one interpretation could be that it's immature to go and mouth off about your life and your encounters with the world in such a public space. Maybe others would see it still as a form of self-immolation. I cannot for the life of me get hired here. I'm beginning to get a complex about it. Yes, girls write in their LiveJournals and Tumblrs but I'm not a girl anymore, not in person, I'm supposed to be polished, professional, some packaged thing. On *FFIMS* I often agonize about whether to tear down the blog and put up a polished professional author website, with reviews of my books and my readings. But I'm tired of trying to hurl my girl-body against the great big unfeeling fortress of academia and old-guard literary publishing.

Perhaps we are already disowned by the culture-at-large. Our writing is a way to fight against this dismissal.

The blogging community of writers that I link to on my blogroll often functions as a legitimizing network — we compare ourselves to each other, we develop an alternative canon. Even though so many of the writers who I communicate with online are outsiders — outside the institutions of writing, whether the major publishing houses or the universities and their creative writing programs. Outside the poetics coteries of academia. We are writers because we say we are. We reassure each other of our potential genius. Because so much of being a writer is, I think, about identity.

I have been told often through this process of becoming a writer that I need to get a thicker skin. Get a thicker skin, they all tell me, the Professor Xs, the editors. Perhaps I don't need to have a thicker skin. Perhaps it's okay that I am porous, sensitive, excessive, emotional. But we do need to be brave. We do need to write *despite* it all.

We need to launch the Bel Esprit for ourselves. We need to save ourselves somehow. Find a space that's safe, that's our own. We do not have the unimpeded minds that Virginia Woolf thought was so necessary for great, transcendent literature. But for some of us our blogs are our reclaimed spaces. The publisher of my second novel recently tried to discipline what I wrote on *Frances Farmer*, advising me to update it more often, urging me to be more positive, to have more fun. Instead I wrote about the alienation and violation of this experience. As the poet and blogger Rebecca Loudon wrote me in the comments as support: "Your blog is like your swimsuit area, no one else can touch it."

In a way this subsubculture of literary blogs, fluid, amorphous, non-hierarchical, functions as a community of solidarity, privately and publicly — fighting against feelings of illegitimacy and invisibility, of feeling like ghosts in the physical world. We send our love, constantly. We have never or rarely met, and we might never meet, in person. We are sometimes transatlantic penpals, intimates. Bett Williams refers to this online community of mostly women writers as a "brainy coven"— I like that. The necessity to have this sort of community in our semi-public existences as writers, a desire to rally against the threat of one's own invisibility and inconseqentiality.

(Although I don't mean to pretend a utopian community online — for all of the generosity I'm describing, I've also experienced the opposite online, even between and with writers I admire, a competiveness or cattiness that mirrors and mimics all of the little literary cliques and enclaves of the past, like mean girls McCarthy and Hardwick dismissing Mrs. Trilling or Anaïs Nin. The oldguard oftentimes devouring the young.)

Yet in this small circle I'm writing towards, the bloggers and writers I met on *FFIMS*, many of us write passionate essays about each other's posts or books. We mythologize ourselves and our processes, not unlike what Flaubert did, his community of family and friends who gathered around and listened to the words he wrote that day. God, think about Flaubert, who was so confident and full of himself, and had the support system of friends and family enabling him to write for years and years without publishing, all the while maintaining his belief in himself as a writer. This we must remember, when we fight feelings of illegitimacy because we are not published or are semi-published, on a small scale. Anaïs Nin who so agonized about this. In her journals, she bemoaned the small audiences for her books, she who self-published, who worried over her career, her invisibility, her publicness, always. (Certainly Anaïs Nin would have blogged.)

So much of modernism is about mythology. The Bloomsbury Group were always writing about each other, performing and posing

for each other, publishing each other on presses and little reviews, publicizing each other. Even when they were self-published (like Virginia Woolf on her Hogarth press). They themselves were a large part of why they are remembered. Now we don't have Peggy Guggenheim to help support us, unlike Jane Bowles or Djuna Barnes, or even much of a chance of ever getting a Guggenheim. We take to the online culture to publicize ourselves and our friends. Alienated from the capitalist machine and the big New York presses, misfits of the academy, perhaps we have started to reinvent the spaces of modernism with their networks and little magazines.

I think what publishing can do is help cement one's own self-identity as a writer — one can do without it, of course, but eventually most writers feel some need for readers, for a communion with the outside. But perhaps the Internet has changed this — perhaps the very act of having readers now makes authors of us. Self-published, Xeroxed in zines, blogged on LiveJournal, later Tumblr, Wordpress, Xanga, Blogger, in micropresses, in comments sections, we write in the margins.

The girl-student with her Marilyn Monroe purse who told me she wanted to write, desperately — but didn't have an agent. This is the idea we need to destroy. We need to foster our own method of agency.

We cannot wait around to be discovered. If you can't write masterpieces why write? the doctors said to Zelda. Perhaps the goal is not to be the next Great American (Male) Novelist. This is perhaps closed to us anyway. The point, perhaps, is to write — by god to write — to write and refuse erasure while we're living at least — and to use up all the channels possible through which to scream, to sing, to singe. All of these things. To write because we desire to, because we need to — and to refuse to be ignored. Or stopped.

The key is to convince ourselves, as Fitzgerald and Flaubert, Eliot and Ezra did, of our eventual genius.

A new ritual I practice, as I get ready to write, I put on my new 4-inch platforms and stand in front of my floorlength mirror, sometimes as I'm eating chocolate almond-milk ice cream, and I intone to the mirror to myself: You're a fucking genius.

Now you try it.

The only way our narratives will be told is if we write them ourselves. I urge you to write your own selves, your true and complicated selves. My scribbling sisters. We are amateurs. We are dilettantes. We are all those terms they use to dismiss the girl writing. We need, perhaps, to reclaim these terms, as well as these categories of "minor" or "outsider" or "illegitimate."

If I have communicated anything to you I hope it is the absolute urgency to write yourself, your body, your own experience. The

absolute necessity for you to write yourself in order to understand yourself, in order to become yourself. I ask you to fight against your own disappearance. To refuse to self-immolate. Or to launch yourself as a burning, glorious spectacle into outer space. To scratch yourself out and begin again, to die and resurrect.

A different sort of nerve is needed. To say fuck you to these internal and social prohibitions dictating what literature should be about. Fuck you to the objective correlative. Fuck the canon. Fuck the boys with their big books.

For, after all, we must be our own heroines.

Working Bibliography

This book is a work of synthesis, a sort of stewing upon a vast number of things, how they intersect, contradict, reveal and obscure, mythologize and memorialize. I sometimes quote from biographies without citation. Most of the time when referencing Vivien(ne) Eliot or Zelda Fitzgerald I am quoting from either the Carole Seymour-Jones biography of Vivien(ne) or Sally Cline's biography of Zelda, both biographies that I would recommend if you want to read more in detail about these women, along with Hermione Lee's biography of Virginia Woolf and Millicent Dillon's on Jane Bowles. David Laskin's book Partisans *was an excellent, and extremely important cultural history that I mined for biographical detail about Elizabeth Hardwick and Mary McCarthy. For a consideration of the connection between automatic writing and* l'écriture féminine*, I am indebted to Katharine Conley's* Automatic Woman. *In considering a feminist as well as Foucauldian context in the history of diagnosis of mental disorders, I was inspired by both Elaine Showalter's* The Female Malady *and Foucault's own work.*

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Select Blogs

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About the Author

Kate Zambreno is the author of two novels, *O Fallen Angel* and *Green Girl* (newly reissued from Harper Perennial). She is also the author of two cross-genre works, *Heroines* (newly reissued as an ebook from Harper Perennial) and *Book of Mutter*. She teaches in the writing programs at Columbia University and Sarah Lawrence College.

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